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**Performing the nation in the street: sanitation, yoga and
the politics of Hindutva in Mumbai.**

Scott McLaughlan.

**Thesis submitted to the Department of Politics, Birkbeck, University of
London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of Birkbeck College, University of London is solely my own work other than when I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others.

I declare that my thesis consists of 85,814 words.

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Abstract

This thesis addresses contemporary strategies of Hindutva politics in Mumbai under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime of Narendra Modi after 2014. It does so by developing an account of two major policies of the Modi-era: Swachh Bharat Abhiyan ('Clean India Mission') and the International Day of Yoga. First, the thesis renders an account of Hindutva as benefitting from the formation of a specific 'Hindu chain of reasoning' (Vanaik, 2017) with deep historical roots in the late-colonial encounter under British rule. It is argued that the resonances and evocations of anti-colonial 'cultural' nationalism have shaped nationalist politics in Bombay, from the late-colonial period to the present. Having offered a critical analysis of Hindutva as a powerful, omnipresent current within the politics of Indian nationalism, the thesis then accounts for the historical formation of the 'political street'. I argue that focus on the political street – as a key venue of nationalist politics – informs contemporary reflections on the effectiveness of Hindutva after 2014.

Second, through close analysis of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga, the thesis makes the case that while normalised as patriotism, duty to the nation and its development, Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga pivot on a well-coordinated political strategy that aims to generate a sense of imagined political community. These strategies converge in the performance of the nation in the street. The thesis accordingly reveals the centrality of class and caste power to Hindutva politics and the logics of a 'new' strategy of theatrical, performative politics that is produced through apparently uncontroversial spaces and seemingly innocuous everyday practices in Mumbai. In conclusion, I place Hindutva in global context and outline a set of closing thoughts, questions and openings for further work, especially in relation to the political possibilities of counter-movements to Hindutva.

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I am especially indebted to Sheeva Dubey for providing me with assistance, direction and friendship in Mumbai.

I would like to acknowledge the kindness and support extended to me as a PhD student in the Department of Politics by Dermot Hodson. Alev Çinar and Neil Maycroft kindly provided materials and offered encouragement during the early stages of the research. Finally, I would also like to extend special thanks to Rick Saull for his mentorship and for encouraging me to pursue a PhD in the first place.

All errors or omissions within the thesis remain, of course, my own.

Note on field data

The field data – observations, informal conversations, interviews and photographs – that feature within chapters four and five of this thesis took place in Mumbai between November 2019 and February 2020. Where names are reproduced within the text most have been changed for reasons of anonymity.

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Chapter one

Introduction to a story of the political street

‘Collective feelings, grievances, and belonging have no better place for expression than urban streets.’

- Asef Bayat (2010, p.13)

‘For us, all 130 Crore Indians are Hindus’.¹

- RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat.

1.1 Introduction

Nationalism, in whatever form, by proxy of its intrinsic modernity, must invent its own past (see Anderson, 2006; Calhoun, 2007; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). Hindutva, as many have pointed out, functions through violence and coercion against Muslims, Dalits and women. Cases of extreme violence perpetrated by Hindutva groups affiliated to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) against India’s minority communities (Muslims in particular) women and lower castes have sharply accelerated in recent years (see Ramachandran, 2020; Teltumbde, 2018). Simply put, Hindutva is a violent ideology and the politics of Hindutva rest on the threat of violence² (Blom Hansen, 1999; Chatterji, Blom Hansen and Jaffrelot, 2019; Desai, 2016; Guha, 2007; Roy, 2014; Nilsen, Nielsen and Vaidya, 2019; Purushotham, 2019; Teltumbde, 2018). This thesis nonetheless argues that to understand how and why the ideology of Hindutva has been so effective after 2014, following the rise of Narendra Modi’s BJP to power it’s absolutely crucial to better understand how Hindutva is also reproduced through seemingly uncontroversial spaces and apparently innocuous everyday practices. To this end, the thesis tells a story about the ‘colonisation’ of urban streets and public

¹ See ‘130 crore Indians are Hindu society: Mohan Bhagwat’, *The Hindu*, 25 December 2019 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/130-crore-indians-are-hindu-society-mohan-bhagwat/article30397898.ece>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

² The most recent account of extreme communal violence orchestrated by the BJP and affiliated Hindutva groups was the February 2020 violence in south Delhi. See Sagar (2021).

spaces by nationalist politics, through close examination of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan ('Clean India Mission') and the International Day of Yoga in the 'political streets' (Bayat, 2010) of central Mumbai, with special reference to the theatrical and performative production of an imagined political community of Hindus in the city. The rise to power of Narendra Modi is key to this story.

In 2014, following a well-financed, pro-business election campaign, Modi's BJP swept to power in India. In his victory speech Modi promised that "good days were coming" and played up his reputation as a 'development man' (*vikas purush*) to an elated crowd in his home constituency of Vadodara. Unlike the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty of the Congress, Modi claimed to be: "a labourer, a worker. The country has never seen such a labourer as me? is there any doubt in your mind about my capacity for hard work?" The stated mission of his BJP government was to ensure "everyone's progress, walking together".³ Accordingly, following the call of UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson in 2013, for major action on sanitation and the elimination of open defecation in the developing world by 2025⁴, almost immediately following his election victory, Modi responded in spectacular fashion. In October 2014, the BJP officially launched the country's largest and most ambitious cleanliness drive to date.

A nation-wide development campaign for the period 2014-2019, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was a pitch to clean up the streets, roads and infrastructure of India's cities, towns and villages and declare the country open defecation free by 2nd October 2019 – the 150-year anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth.⁵

³ See 'Indian election result: 2014 is Modi's year as BJP secures victory', *The Guardian*, 16 May 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/16/india-election-2014-results-live>, last accessed 20 August 2020.

⁴ Poor public sanitation is a root cause of the transmission of deadly disease and the stunting of juvenile growth. It has a detrimental effect on human wellbeing, heightens social anxiety and exacerbates the risk of sexual assault. According to the WHO, cholera, dysentery, diarrhoea, hepatitis A, typhoid and polio are all exacerbated by poor sanitation. See WHO Factsheet, 14 June 2019 <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sanitation>, last accessed 02 May 2020.

⁵ Swachh Bharat has two main thrusts: Swachh Bharat Abhiyan ("gramin" or rural), which operates under the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (urban), which operates under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. In this thesis I focus exclusively on the latter.

The missions official concern is with toilet construction, investment in solid waste management and the execution of a wide-ranging public relations campaign. Above all, the official aim of Swachh Bharat is to connect public health and sanitation to major objectives of the elimination of open defecation and manual scavenging (the manual removal of untreated human excreta from dry latrines and sewers). Modi's mission has been enthusiastically received, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for instance, has stated that Swachh Bharat 'provides a global model for sanitation reform'.⁶ Linked to the perceived success of Swachh Bharat, Modi was awarded a Gates Foundation Award in September 2019. The ambitious decision to launch Swachh Bharat early in the new governments first term appeared to confirm Modi's credentials as 'development man' on a mission.

India faces a whole series of development challenges in the twenty-first century, chief among which is the need to radically improve its frail public health system in the context of mass urbanisation. While the Indian economy has undergone significant revival since 1991, the spread of the social benefits of economic growth has been radically uneven. Between 1951 and 1980 the bottom 50% of India's population captured 28% of national growth. Between 1980 and 2015, this situation was reversed, as 'the top 0.1% of earners captured a higher share of total growth than the bottom 50% (12% vs. 11%), while the top 1% received a higher share of total growth than the middle 40% (29% vs. 23%)' (Chancel and Piketty, 2018, p. 1). The result of this remarkable shift as it relates to public health has been catastrophic. The Modi government has proposed to raise the public health budget to just 2.5 percent of GDP by 2025.⁷ This shortfall has become starkly obvious in the context of COVID-19.

⁶ See the strategy overview of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 'What We Do: Water Sanitation & Hygiene: Strategy Overview', <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/what-we-do/global-growth-and-opportunity/water-sanitation-and-hygiene>, last accessed 02 May 2020. A vocal cheerleader of the Indian PM, billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates has congratulated Modi personally, praising his "continued commitment to improve health, nutrition, and development". See 'Bill Gates Congratulates PM Modi on Poll Win', *NDTV.com*, 25 May, 2019 <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/bill-gates-congratulates-pm-modi-on-poll-win-2042713>, last accessed 2 May 2020.

⁷ Compare this to low income countries in south Asia such as Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Nepal that spend 2.5%, 1.6% and 1.1% respectively – the global average is 6%. See 'India's Health Crisis: National

By contrast, great energy has been invested into the promotion of yoga as a holistic system of public health assurance. Ratified by the UN General Assembly at Modi's request, a UN resolution was passed on 11th December 2015 stating that the event would be celebrated annually on 21st June. Delivering the inaugural keynote address to the General Assembly, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon argued that yoga is good for health and spirit, [and] that '[it] does not discriminate; to varying degrees all people can practice regardless of their strength, age or ability'.⁸ Furthermore, the Secretary General uncritically endorsed Modi's earlier statement to the General Assembly that "yoga is not just about exercise, it is a way to discover oneness with yourself, the world and nature". A communique from Ban Ki-Moon's office in 2015 claimed that 'observance of the International Day of Yoga highlights the important role healthy living plays in the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted last year by all 193 United Nations Member States'.⁹ According to this discourse, yoga – a means of personal development and positivity in body and mind – is uniquely placed to act as a vehicle for the production of collective consciousness to deal with global challenges.

These brief contextual outlines of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga point to something important about a remarkable transformation unfolding following Modi's landslide victory in 2014. Critiques of the Modi regime have pointed out that India is fast becoming a 'majoritarian' Hindu state at the same time as it is becoming more globalised

Health Profile 2018', *DownToEarth.org.in*, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/dte-infographics/india_s_health_crisis/index.html national health profile 2018, last accessed 12 May 2020. See also, National Health Profile 2018, 13th Issue. *Government of India: Central Bureau of Health Intelligence*, <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/file/NHP%202018.pdf>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

⁸ See *UN Web TV*, 21 June 2015, <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/watch/ban-ki-moon-un-secretary-general-on-the-international-day-of-yoga/4311219298001/?term=Screenshot>, last accessed 12 May 2020

⁹ See 'Message on the International Day of Yoga', *United Nations Information Service*, 21 June 2016, <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2016/unissgsm756.html>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

than ever before (Chatterji, Blom Hansen and Jaffrelot, 2019; Nilsen, Nielsen and Vaidya, 2019). This thesis tells a story of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga not in terms of ‘development’, public health and wellbeing, but as part of a political strategy towards the production of an imagined political community of Hindus. While ‘development’ is evidently a concern, it is not considered by the BJP in the usual sense of concentrated public works and investment in social and economic infrastructures. Rather, it is considered in terms of the development of a sense of imagined political community towards transfiguration of India into a Hindu nation (Hindu rashtra).

1.2 Research questions and the argument

The guiding principle of these two case studies – focusing on sanitation/cleanliness and yoga – connects to a structure of argument that places concerns with the discipline of the body, production of moral community and notion of Hinduism as a ‘world-dynamic’ force, as the hard core of Hindutva politics (2.3). In the hands of the BJP, the ideology of Hindutva promotes Indian (read: Hindu) culture to ‘integrate’ and ‘organise’ an idealised vision of the Hindu nation (Hindu rashtra). Through discipline, organisation (*sangathan*) and selfless service to the nation (*seva*) India is to be rendered into a Hindu state (Bhatt, 2001, 140). In the Hindu tradition ‘seva’ denotes selfless service, towards society, the individual, one’s guru or God. In the context of Hindutva, ‘seva’ stems from a concern with the dissemination of ‘Hindu awareness and national discipline’ (Jaffrelot, 2005, p. 216).¹⁰ Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga intertwine ‘traditional’ Hindu themes of cleanliness, purity of society and of the self. Taken together, they disseminate the message and practice of ‘selfless service’ to the nation and ‘Indian’ culture. At the same time, they connect with

¹⁰ Jaffrelot is quoted in Bhattacharjee (2021). The RSS organises a wide spectrum of humanitarian service organisations, from disaster relief to forest conservation projects around the principle of ‘seva’ (see Bhattacharjee 2019; Dyahadroy 2009; Thachil 2016).

contemporary urban aspirations for beautification, health and wellness. In this regard, both campaigns figure as forms of political mobilisation that work in seemingly uncontroversial spaces and through apparently innocuous everyday practices. Most importantly, while both campaigns appear as benign and non-threatening, in the last instance they are backed by the threat of violence. Through analysis of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga, I focus on how Hindutva becomes effective and crystallises through the ‘colonisation’ of urban streets and public spaces. The thesis considers the following research question(s):

- *How and why is the ideology of Hindutva so effective? what tools are used to mobilise diverse populations towards the production of imagined community in the political streets of Mumbai? And what role, if any, does the ‘colonisation’ of urban public spaces play?*

To answer these questions, I proffer a materialist political sociology of the ‘political street’ and its formation, that is concerned with how the ideology of Hindutva crystallises and becomes effective through political performances in and through urban public space at particular moments in particular places. I tell this story with special reference to the city of Mumbai.

Mumbai makes for an interesting case study for exploratory research because it allows for a detailed reconstruction of how Hindutva politics have been produced in India’s major commercial city, well known for its role as a hub mediating global flows of capital, ideology, media, technology and people (Appadurai 1996). In my view, the city is at the vanguard of modern political forms and serves the purpose of this thesis without negating the experience of other Indian cities. Mumbai has a long history of nationalist, socialist, communist, regionalist and caste-based political traditions. It is also a city that developed from a small coastal fishing village into its present form by way of the imperial logics of British colonial rule. Built on an archipelago of seven islands following large scale land reclamation, by the mid-nineteenth century,

Bombay became a major port-city of British empire.¹¹ The city was the place of the first meeting of the Indian National Congress and produced some of its leading politicians, from both ‘moderate’ and ‘extremist’ factions. It has been the site of some of the most radical and mass-based social movements and political currents in late-colonial and post-colonial India, from the Indian National Congress; the Communist Party of India (CPI); Mahar (Dalit) movement and Dalit Panthers to the Hindu Mahasabha; RSS and Shiv Sena.¹² Bombay has been a centre of mass organisational forms, anti-colonial, nationalist and working class militancy since the long period of British rule (Omvedt, 1994, p. 139).

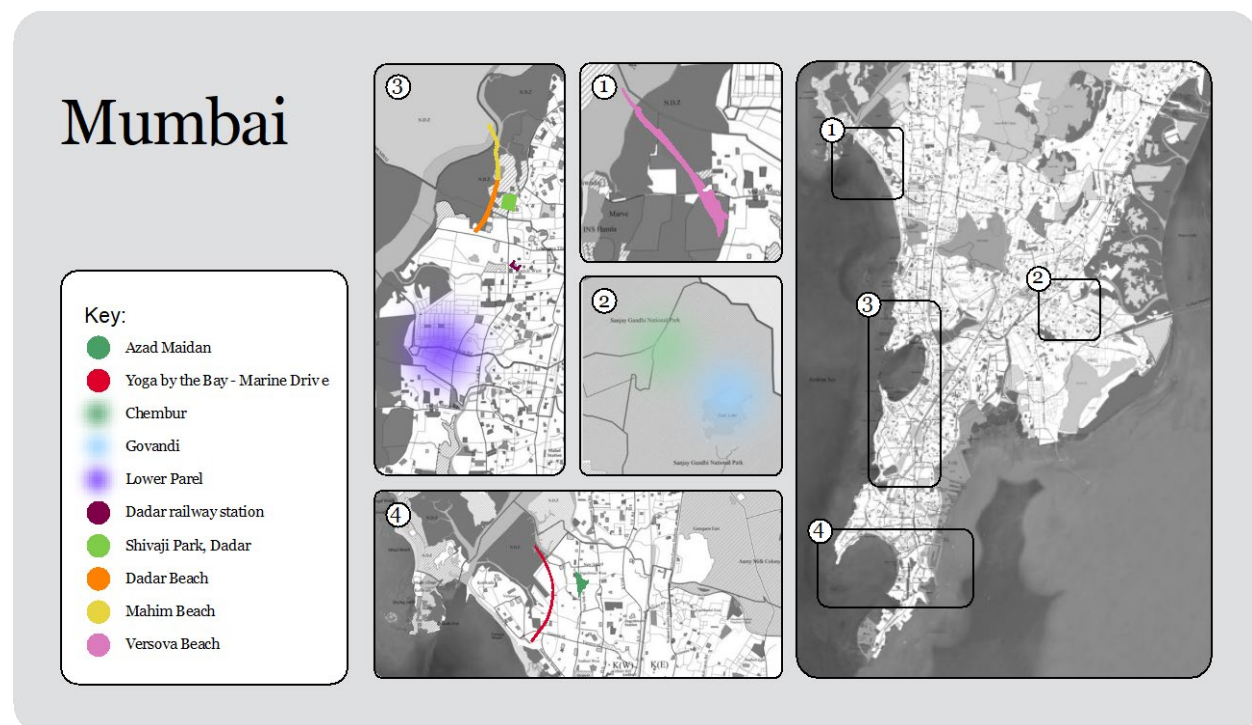
Like many cities, Mumbai is characterised by the existence of rich and poor in close proximity. Yet Mumbai is a radically dense city in which multiple worlds occupy the same spaces. Further still, it is a city not simply characterised by its architecture, but with reference to the shifting temporal landscape of the political street.¹³ While monumental architecture most certainly plays a key role in the establishment of a nation (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; see also Anderson, 2020), in contemporary Mumbai, it is not the only spectacle through which urban aspirations are represented. The flux of the street, dynamics of urban public space and undulating sociality of the streets play a powerful role. Home to one of the most aggressive real estate markets in the world (Appadurai, 1996; 2001; Weinstein, 2014), as the city expands, ‘its open spaces are shrinking’, this means that ‘the democratic ‘space’ that ensures accountability and enables dissent is also shrinking’ (Das, 2014). In this regard, I argue that the city’s streets and open public spaces are critical to the dissemination of *multiple and various* forms of politico-cultural expression.

¹¹ In this thesis the names Bombay and Mumbai (after 1995) are both used. It is worth noting that many residents of the city still use the refer to ‘Bombay’. I use Bombay with reference to the city before 1995 and Mumbai when I refer to the city in the post-1995 period.

¹² While the RSS was formed in Nagpur, many of its early supporters and leading lights were involved in Bombay politics.

¹³ See Rahul Mehrotra’s commentary in Maher, T. L. 2011. ‘Extreme Urbanism 1: Reimagining Mumbai’s Back Bay’. *Vimeo*, <https://vimeo.com/33709110>, last accessed 15th September 2020.

With this in mind, this thesis focuses on the ‘colonisation’ of urban public space by the ideology of Hindutva. With special reference to performative, theatrical politics, I tell a story about how Hindutva becomes effective through analysis of a mosaic of some of Mumbai’s most important open public spaces: the city’s beaches and seafronts, from Versova down to Mahim, Dadar Beach and Marine Drive; open public spaces such as Azad Maidan, Shivaji Park and the Gateway of India. I focus on the former mill lands of Lower Parel and the busy transport hub of Dadar railway station. I also refer in chapter four to the popular suburban residential areas of Chembur and Govandi in eastern Mumbai. The sinews of the city are of course the network of streets that abut and conjoin these spaces (see figure 1). I claim that this kind of analytical focus is important because urban public space – its use, as well as the questions of being, belonging, culture and identity that animate it – is political. Simply put, I argue that ‘there is a politics of space because space is political’ (Lefebvre, 1973, p. 59).¹⁴



¹⁴ Lefebvre is quoted in Elden (2007, p. 107).

Figure 1: The spaces of the thesis. (Map adapted by the author and Lewis Bull from an original design: 'Mumbai's Open Spaces Map' by P.K Das & Associates).

The crux of my argument here, then, is that understood as crucibles of shared feeling and public opinion, city streets and open public spaces are key to the formation of collective political expression (Bayat, 2017, p. 105). The focus of this study is the formation of the urban public sphere through a story of the political street. The 'actual' street is a space of radical heterogeneity, segregation and fracture, in particular, along lines of class, gender, caste and religion. At the same time urban public space doubles as a space of connection, mutual aid and solidarity. The 'political' street accounts for the ways in which segregations and difference are sewn together and 'sutured' around collective political projects. In this context, the thesis that follows explores how the ideology of Hindutva has become so effective, what tools are deployed towards the production of imagined community in the political street, and how these processes converge in the 'colonisation' of urban public space. The thesis is consequently about the city and 'the urban', but more so, about what Asef Bayat (2010; 2017) calls the 'political street'.

To tell a story about how Hindutva becomes effective through a particular set of spaces also necessitates an understanding of history, context and the 'conjuncture of conditions.' This thesis engages in the study of history, then, but selectively and in a highly uneven manner. Though the history of the city and its political economy is an important aspect of the research, I do not engage in an attempt to reconstruct the social history of the city as a whole. Rather, I focus on the excavation of particular histories, political strategies and socio-political narratives in the formation of the political street. In times of social instability and political change, from the late-colonial 'internationalist moment' (Goswami, 2012; Lewis, 2016; Raza et al, 2014; Zachariah, 2005) to the present era of globalised neoliberalism, Hindu nationalist forms have come to dominate the political life of urban India

through various forms of street performance, from everyday religious ritual to the overtly political.

As I discuss in more depth in chapter three, Bombay/Mumbai has a long history of nationalist, working class and caste-based organisation and radicalism, connected to questions of public space and often backed by the threat of violence. As Robert Rahman (2019, pp. 273-274) has pointed out, in the late-colonial period, the Indian National Congress made concrete efforts to extend and stitch together Indian ‘accustomed space’ through ‘the organisation of festivals and collective activities in public spaces’.¹⁵ The aim was to territorially colonise the urban public spaces of the British Raj. Since the late-colonial period, then, nationalist mobilisation has attempted to weave the rich social tapestries of the city together and imagine the city – and by extension a particular vision of political community – in its totality (Rahman, 2019, p. 273). Accordingly, this thesis advances a historical argument that connects Ganpati Utsava, civil disobedience and the communist moment in the city to Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga – with a view to situating the study of Hindutva in Mumbai within the wider context of political economy and the colonisation of urban public space. Accordingly, I substantiate the claims of the thesis through an analysis of historically transforming social relations, economic conditions and the political constellation (see Koivisto and Lahtinen, 2012).

To study contemporary Hindutva politics the neoliberal conjuncture must be accounted for. The concept of an historical conjuncture delineates ‘a space of time within which a particular combination (or conjunction) of causes exercises a predominant (causal and imaginative) influence over the course of events and the production of ideas’ (Rosenburg, 2005, p. 29). As Antonio Gramsci put it, it is in the context of specific conjunctures that ‘antagonistic forces organise’ and struggle over a ‘new reality’. On the ground, political

¹⁵ See also Masselos (1991).

struggles develop through a 'series of ideological, religious, philosophical, political, and juridical polemics, whose concreteness can be estimated by the extent to which they are convincing and shift the previously existing disposition of social forces'.¹⁶ To study the conjuncture, then, is to account for the circumstances that determine socio-historical moments in space and time. From this point of departure, I take the position that the present is neither autonomous or immutable. At the same time, I claim that it is problematic to simply take the present as given and extrapolate backwards through time in a bid to better understand (Hobson, Lawson and Rosenberg, 2010, p. 17).

Given the emphasis of this thesis on urban public space as a key medium of Indian politics and the importance of specific conjunctures to the development of socio-political struggles, I start by accounting for the formation of the political street in three movements that were critical to the anti-colonial struggle in late-colonial Bombay: Ganpati Utsava, anti-colonial civil disobedience and the Bombay communist movement. My argument here is that a 'Hindu chain of reasoning' (Vanaik, 2017) that has animated Indian nationalism from its origins to the present, crystallised in the political street in the late-colonial context of tensions between India and Empire. Following this analysis, I argue that in a remarkably similar way, the seemingly unstoppable resurgence of Hindutva politics that began in the 1990s and has been consolidated under the Bharatiya Janata Party regime of Narendra Modi after 2014, has crystallised in the political street amidst the tensions between India and the globalisation of neoliberalism.

Why turn back to the formation of the political street rather than simply think about its formation in the present? My claim is not that a striking path dependency in the trajectory of Indian nationalism stretches from the late-colonial period to the present.¹⁷ But rather, that the nationalist themes that

¹⁶ Gramsci is quoted in Koivisto and Lahtinen (2012, pp. 269-270).

¹⁷ Politico-historical conjunctural analysis differs from explanations of why the ideology of Hindutva has been so successful that emphasise the early infusion of the Indian nationalist movement with a

crystallised as Indian modernity took relatively stable form in the late-colonial period (Sarkar, 1989, p. xvi) have been reconstituted in the neoliberal conjuncture. The central claim of the thesis in this regard is that mapping the regulating rhythms of dominant social forces in urban spaces – and concomitant rhythmic dissonances – provides a critical entry point for an analysis of the production of passages into political subjectivity. Tracing the development of the political streets of central Mumbai from late-colonial Bombay to the present, the thesis that follows offers a window into the ways in which Hindutva becomes effective through the political streets of contemporary Mumbai; fully integrated with global capitalism on the one hand, and hierarchically structured around conservative Hindu fundamentalist values on the other. Through the concept of the conjuncture, then, we can examine conditions of political intervention to better understand the relations between neoliberal political economy and the historical contexts in which Hindutva has evolved and crystallised.

Hindutva in the neoliberal city

The city is a place where capital becomes concentrated, surplus is produced, and social difference comes together; the focal point of consumption and everyday life. At the same time, the street is the primary arena of complex interaction and crucible of social difference. In terms of the production of cultural hybridity and new conditions of political possibility but also in terms of contestation and antagonism (Bayat, 2010, 2017; Harvey, 2006; Lefebvre, 2003). Though Mumbai is a city shaped of course by social conditions of ‘difference’ peculiar to the dynamics of a postcolonial society, I claim that it is

distinctive Hindu vernacular (see Ahmad, 2004; 2015; Anderson, 2013; Vanaik, 2017). For instance, in recent years, Perry Anderson (2013) has argued that due to the shortcomings of the national movement, modern India has become ‘a fundamentally Hindu polity with deep autocratic tendencies’. Problematically, as Sanjay Ruparelia (2014, p. 163) points out, affording such a ‘mighty path-dependency’ to the early national movement risks the implication that all the ‘patterns of deprivation, inequality, and coercion that afflict India today reflect the sin of its origins.’ Emphasising the importance of conjunctural analysis, this thesis circumvents the evident problems of conducting a sweeping macro-level, long-wave historical-sociological analysis in a country as social complex and hugely diverse as India.

a city shaped more so by neoliberalism, to the extent that neoliberalism refers to a historically specific political project for the consolidation of class power and shift towards a globalised pattern of the flexible accumulation of capital (Harvey, 2005).¹⁸

Thomas Blom Hansen (1999, pp. 11-12) has pointed out that the appeal of Hindutva does not lie in its appropriation of religious sentiments and symbolism of Hinduism as such. But rather, in its meaningful connection with the pervasive sense of uncertainty, fear or urban disorder and general ambivalence that characterises modern life. Analysing the politics of Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga on the ground, I argue that taken together, they represent a recalibration of political strategy, where Hindutva has been recharged and hooked up to bourgeois hopes and desires for the recognition of India on the world stage and the revival of its past mythical glory; for the beautification of urban space; and the want to participate in globalised neoliberal aesthetics and lifestyle choices.

Yet Hindutva does not simply reflect the divisions and cleavages of Indian neoliberalism. Neither does it serve exclusively as a political vehicle for the ambitions and influences of political leaders. Rather, the politics of Hindutva *articulates* the social cleavages of neoliberal India in an attempt to ‘remake’ Indian state-society relations (see de Leon, Desai and Tuğal, 2015). By ‘political articulation’ de Leon, Desai and Tuğal refer to ‘the process by which parties’ ‘suture’ together coherent blocs and cleavages from a disparate set of consistencies and individuals, who, even by virtue of sharing circumstances, may not necessarily share the same political identity’ (de Leon, Desai and Tuğal, 2015, p. 2). The creative potential of political parties and the ‘means of articulation’ – specific tools used to mobilise diverse populations – are crucial within this process. The power of theatrical performance in the street and its

¹⁸ I assess the question of neoliberalism in light of the spectre of postcolonial urbanism in depth in chapter two (2.4).

importance for the media strategy of the BJP – in the form of Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga – is not spontaneous but requires planning: an organising infrastructure and the colonisation of the political street. Simply put, this thesis argues that Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga are key aspects of a political strategy to actively articulate cleavages, interests and a particular ideal of imagined community and ‘Hindu social order’, through a politics of performative theatricality rooted in the political street.

Drawing upon a political sociological approach to the production of knowledge and working with a conceptual apparatus adapted primarily from Asef Bayat’s (2010) concept of the political street, as well as Henri Lefebvre’s writings on everyday life (1995; 2014) and aspects of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of politics (1971), I claim that a focus on how the politics of Hindutva crystallises through moments of theatricality and performance in the political street, offers a distinct vantage point for considering how and why the politics of Hindutva have been so effective in the Modi era. The thesis also sheds light on the methods and tools that are used by Hindutva ideologues to mobilise diverse urban populations. This introductory chapter will proceed as follows. First, I discuss the context of the study and its significance (1.3) before moving on to set out the theoretical framework of the thesis (1.4.) I then discuss questions of methodology (1.5). Finally, I provide a chapter by chapter overview of the thesis (1.6).

1.3 Context of the study and its significance

In many ways the significance of this study lies in the fact that the politics of Hindutva are far from unique. Commitment to cultural and political pluralism has been conspicuous in its absence in many of the world’s liberal democracies in the last decade. Instead, faith in political ‘strong men’ and promises of a return to a golden-era of stability and prosperity have taken centre stage. In

the United States, the illusive promise to “Make America Great Again” captured hearts and minds in 2016 to catapult businessman and television personality Donald Trump into the White House. In a similar fashion, President of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro was elected on the back of scapegoating minorities and calling for a return to the days of dictatorship. In Hungary, after a landslide victory in 2010, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has worked to incrementally suppress the opposition, take over the media and centralise power, all the while stoking an anti-Semitic image of the ‘globalist’ enemy.¹⁹ Even more similar to the Indian experience, Recep Tayipp Erdoğan’s *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) stoke Turkish nationalism by cracking down on dissent and the civil and political rights of Turkey’s Kurdish minority. In Israel, under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu, Likud and the politics of the far-right grow bolder and bolder in both their actions and demands. While not strictly coming to power, a whole raft of far-right parties have emerged across the European political landscape, gaining national seats and political representation in the European parliament.²⁰ It is undeniable that in recent years something resembling a “populist wave” has crashed over many of the world’s so-called liberal democracies.²¹

Right-wing “populism” is not of course without historical roots. As a loose configuration of political ideas, it hails from the dissemination of totalitarian ideals of race, purity, blood and soil, assembled alongside the rise of mass politics in the twentieth century and international circulation of these political

¹⁹ The abstraction of ‘the enemy’ is frequently materialised in the figure of the famous Hungarian-American Jewish financier and investor George Soros, who runs a number of initiatives in his native Hungary. For Donald Trump the enemy is ‘liberals’ backed by the ‘fake news media’. Bolsonaro singles out ‘leftists’ and ‘homosexuals’ in particular.

²⁰ Examples include Golden Dawn in Greece; Rassemblement National (National Rally) in France; Lega Nord in Italy and the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). While the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) certainly fits with this trend, within the confines of the ‘first past the post’ system in the UK, it has been less successful in terms of winning seats in parliament. Nonetheless, the sentiments represented by the party have proved popular with English voters. Though UKIP have been effectively wiped out following the decision of UK voters to exit the European Union, arguably, UKIP’s brand of racist anti-immigration politics were successfully metabolised by Boris Johnson’s Conservative Party in the lead up to the 2019 UK General Election which he won by a landslide.

²¹ There is a huge and expanding literature on populism. See for example, Colás (2004); Eatwell and Goodwin (2018); Hadiz (2016); Hadiz and Chrysosgelos (2017); Moffitt (2016); Müller (2016).

ideas (see Finchenstein, 2017; Raza et al, 2014; Saull et al 2015). Religious idiom and revivalist tones are complimented by modern Enlightenment themes of liberty, emancipation, rights and political power. In the case of Hindutva, ideas of race, nation, and elite fears of mass popular sovereignty are tightly intertwined with the historical development of Western imperial constellations (Bayly, 2008; Bhatt, 1997; 2001; Thapar, Noorani and Menon, 2016; Zachariah, 2005).

On the back of this history, in the past several decades, the BJP has engaged in a project for the transfiguration of India into a Hindu nation. With Narendra Modi placed as supreme leader, the BJP are in reality the political front of the far larger Hindu supremacist national volunteer organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS, often referred to as ‘the Sangh’, is the most successful right-wing organisation in the world, and with its family of organisations – the ‘Sangh Parivar’ – is set up to organise all areas of Indian society into a Hindu rashtra (Ahmad, 2020). Taking Fascism and Nazism as their inspiration, the RSS seeks the production of a uniform Indian society.²² For the RSS, strength ‘comes only through organisation’ and the ‘ideal of the Sangh is to carry the nation to the pinnacle of glory, through organising the entire society and ensuring the protection of Hindu Dharma’.²³ ‘Hindu Rashtra’, then, serves as a euphemism for the restoration of a fictional golden past based in totalitarian upper caste rule, akin to the infamous Nazi constellation of ‘ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer’ (‘one people, one nation, one leader’) (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 44; 264).²⁴

As Hannah Arendt (2017) powerfully argued in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, conditions of social atomisation that characterise mass

²² On the connections between Hindutva and historical fascism, see for instance, Ahmad (2015; 2020); Bhatt (2001); Casolari (2000); Sarkar (1993) Vanaik (2017).

²³ Taken from <http://rss.org/Encyc/2012/10/22/rss-vision-and-mission.html>, last accessed, 12 May 2020.

²⁴ Yet, at the aggregate level, under the leadership of the current RSS Chief (sarsanghchalak), Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS plays a critical role as the fountainhead of BJP power.

societies of modern society, enable political ‘strong men’ to emerge and tell a compelling story that explains why ‘the people’ are unhappy and lay out the fictional roots of injustice for all to see. Hindutva – and indeed Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga – must be placed within this broader global history of democracy and its troubled relationships with the politics of far-right “populist” authoritarian nationalisms. What this broad context of far-right politics tells us about India, is that the ‘domestic’ coordinates of Indian society are inexplicably linked with global circulations of ideas, changes in political strategy and shifts in economy and society. With this context in mind, I argue that the politics of contemporary Hindutva are to be considered in the context of the far-reaching implementation of a raft of policies aiming for the liberalisation of the economy in 1991.

Caste and class in neoliberal India

Alongside the rapid consolidation of the power of corporate India, the post-liberalisation period has been characterised by the rise of lower castes and classes into the echelon of small and medium business owners and professionals. Such groups have simultaneously benefitted from greater access to higher education, formal employment and housing. These shifting dynamics have simultaneously coincided with a loss of symbolic (and financial) distinction previously afforded to upper castes. With the Congress largely deemed corrupt and ineffective, I argue with [Chatterji, Blom Hansen and Jaffrelot, \(2019, pp. 8-9\)](#) that support for Hindutva is connected with this inversion of power. Like many of the cases of the so-called populist wave indexed above, Modi has been able to mobilise conservative Indians alarmed by the ‘growing assertiveness of plebeians’ (especially minorities) as well as those that he calls the ‘neo middle classes’ themselves.²⁵ In this context, to understand the politics of Hindutva, I suggest that attention must be paid to

²⁵ By ‘neo-middle class’ Modi refers in the main to lower caste and class migrants to Indian cities in search of good jobs in the private sector, following liberalisation after 1991. See [Chatterji, Blom Hansen and Jaffrelot \(2019, pp. 8-9\)](#).

the ways in which class struggle manifests in dialectical combination with the persistence of the caste system (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 116).

The word 'caste' was applied to the Hindu system of social stratification by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century upon their arrival in the subcontinent. Derived from the Latin *castus*, in Portuguese, *casta* means 'lineage', 'pure', or 'chaste'. The Portuguese understanding of caste thus relates to something approximating 'race'. Anand Teltumbde (2010, p. 12) provides a neat description: 'caste, as such, is a form of social stratification involving a mode of hierarchically arranged, closed endogamous strata, membership to which is ascribed by descent and between which contact is restricted and mobility impossible.' The Indian word for caste is *Jaati* and when we talk of 'caste' what is really under consideration is *Jaati*. The *Jaati* system of vocational guilds, some one thousand years ago, became organised in relation to principles of purity and impurity. And each *Jaati* – of which there are literally thousands – has its own norms of conduct (rules around marriage, social interaction, permissible food and occupation etc.). From each *Jaati* follows a series of sub-castes rendering the system immensely complicated (Teltumbde, 2010, pp. 12-14).

Caste is frequently confused with the four-fold *varna* system codified in the Vedic-Brahmin *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu). In hierarchical order, the four *varnas* or *savarna* (caste Hindus) include *Brahmins* (priests; intellectuals); *Kshatriyas* (warriors; administrators); *Vaishyas* (farmers; traders); and *Shudras* (workers; labourers). 'Outcaste' from the Hindu fold are those who do not belong to any *varna* (*avarna*): 'Untouchables' or later, 'Dalits' ('depressed' or 'broken' peoples), who are seen to be polluting of caste Hindu society. Dalit communities are assigned the most 'unclean' tasks within a broad division of labour: the removal of waste; tending of funeral pyres; butchery; and working with animal carcasses to produce leather (Teltembde, 2010, p. 14).

First of all, it is critical to note that caste relations are not static and unchanging. For example, many aspects of caste, in particular, those of ritual practice, have almost entirely disappeared with the advance of capitalist social relations. The rise of the laboring Shudra castes is also important to note. Following the creation of a class of wealthy farmers in the 1960s – the so-called ‘Green Revolution’ – ritual practices separating ‘twice-born’ castes and the Shudra castes have more or less collapsed. In this context, in many instances, Shudras have become immensely powerful and, in some areas and regions, dominant. The Maratha caste of Maharashtra is a particular case in point (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 105). The consequences of the expansion of capitalism in India on caste relations overtime, has been that the caste system has been largely reduced ‘to a class like formation of caste and non-caste or non-Dalits and Dalits’ (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 105).

That being said, the full and wide spectrum of caste identities continue to structure life-worlds across the subcontinent. The production of any imagined political community of Hindus therefore evidently requires a negotiation with caste but also with class. For instance, though class stratification within castes is evident,²⁶ at the same time, caste consciousness continues to exert a powerful grip over socio-cultural identities in a way that cuts through potential class distinctions. On this note there exists no straightforward route to the formation of class consciousness that cuts across caste (see Kapadia, 1995, p. 12). Accordingly, in the thesis that follows, I understand the class-caste dialectic of contemporary Indian society in the terms famously pointed out by E.P Thompson (1965, p. 357), as ‘not this or that part of the machine, but *the way the machine works* once it is set in motion’.²⁷

²⁶ See for example the relatively small but rising number of Dalit capitalists that exist alongside and within the same spaces as Dalit manual scavengers (Prakash, 2015; Teltumbde, 2018; Yengde, 2019).

²⁷ Thompson articulated a view of class as a ‘happening’, stating that he did not see ‘class as a “structure”, nor even as a “category”, but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships’ (Thompson, 1968, pp. 9-10; see also Efstathiou, 2014, pp. 409-410). Thompson is quoted in Teltumbde (2018, p. 91).

Thus, while I claim that caste is not *the* central axis of the politics of Hindutva, I argue that caste matters, and Hindutva is casteist. For example, as we see in chapter four, caste matters especially in relation to practices of cleanliness and sanitation. Yet this does not mean that Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is necessary a simple reflection of caste relations. Neither is it necessary to try and isolate the evidently complex and shifting contradictory and fluid dynamics of caste. Instead, to better understand how the ideology of Hindutva becomes effective through the performative ‘colonisation’ of urban spaces, the dialectic of class and caste that animates Indian social relations demands for the focus of resolution to be adjusted away from a reification of static and mechanical categories, and towards analysis of social relations of production in the political street.

1.4 Hindutva between the sacred and the urban: the literature

As we will see throughout the thesis, Hindutva is not a religious movement. But rather, a political movement that expounds a historically specific religio-cultural paradigm that aims for the social transformation of Indian society. Through analysis of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga as powerful ‘means of articulation’, the thesis seeks to contribute to political sociological understandings of how and why the ideology of Hindutva has become so effective. To do so, I afford a prominent role to the colonisation of urban public space as a means articulate the social cleavages of neoliberalism and to mobilise diverse populations behind a political project for the remaking of Indian state-society relations. This section of the chapter critically discusses existing political-geographical and sociological literatures that address spatial strategies of Hindutva and the politics of ‘the local’. Following this discussion, I set out a theoretical framework to guide the present work that pivots on the connections between the production of imagined political communities (Anderson, 2006) and the ‘political street’ (Bayat, 2010) in more depth (1.5).

The banality of neighbourliness

Writing on the nexus between Hindutva and the spatio-temporal reproduction of urban life, for Satish **Deshpande (2000)**²⁸ the religious, or ‘sacred’, the political, and urban space are explicitly coupled together. Drawing on Michel **Foucault’s (1984)** concept of heterotopia, **Deshpande** provides an analysis of Hindutva as a particular ‘spatial strategy’ that seeks to redefine Indian national space through the transformation of local public space into ‘sacred’ Hindu space. ‘Heterotopic spaces’, as **Foucault** argued, confirm the existence of concrete sites, *outside* of established systems of norms: what he called ‘heterotopias of deviation’. These sites ‘always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable’ (**Foucault, 1984, p. 47**). In relation to all the space that remains, the role of heterotopia is to create a space that is Other from the prevailing system of norms within which the daily lives of individuals are regulated (**Foucault, 1984, p. 48**).

Drawing on this reading of space, **Deshpande (2000, p. 171)** claims that ‘ideological practices involved in the construction of heterotopias’ give distinct coloration to the production of Hindutva as spatial strategy. On this account, the success of a spatial strategy is predicated upon the connection of ‘abstract (imagined) spaces to concrete (physical) spaces’ (**Oza, 2007, p. 153**). Thus, beyond the usual focus on spectral, episodic experiences of communal politics (and violence) that are frequently offered up to understand processes of collective identity formation, **Deshpande** is interested in the ways that ‘mundane, everyday experiences’ are recruited to the cause. On this basis, a powerful argument emerges to stress that the appeal of Hindutva resides in the ‘sedimented banalities of “neighborliness.”’ This is to be theorised, according to **Deshpande (2000, p. 198)**, in terms of ‘the long term, ‘live in’

²⁸ Deshpande also rehearses these arguments in *Contemporary India: A Sociological View (2003)*. However, due to the lack of significant modification in this work, I have chosen to cite the argument as it was originally presented.

intimacy of residential relationships among persons and families, and between them and their local environment’.

The proposition of the ‘banality of neighbourliness’ is rich and conceptually promising. However, it fails to recognise that the theory of heterotopia as a concept for ‘mapping’ theoretical space is not without its problems. Through recourse to a grammar of spatial metaphor, Foucault sought to express the relations that are possible between power and knowledge and the processes by which they function (Smith and Katz, 1993, p. 72). Yet, in his later life, he expressed a concern that heterotopia might render space ‘as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the invisible’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 177). This admission speaks directly to David Harvey’s (2007, p. 45) Lefebvrian argument that space must be viewed dialectically. In other words, the premise that ‘life-world’ and ‘place’ are constructed in relation to each other, and through the operation of material sociological processes, intersect across ‘spatiotemporal scales’. In this context, space, place and life-world ‘hang together’ (see Harvey, 1996, pp. 350-352). Social relations in the city must be read as generative of this relational dialectic. Heterotopia, by contrast, entails a static rather than dialectical understanding of space that fails to capture lived experience and its articulation with urban, regional, national and global scales of social life (see Goonewardena, 2005, p. 69; Lefebvre, 2003, p. 100).

In my view, Deshpande is entirely correct to cite the decline of the Congress, the developmental state, the emergence of a ‘new media’ landscape and the expansion and consolidation of national television networks as crucial to the reinvigoration of Hindutva during the 1980s and 1990s.²⁹ The seizure of territory and colonisation of space – both imagined and real – is key to the intentions of Hindutva forces. However, while noting the salience of these developments, it is remarkable that the ‘sacred geography’ of Hindutva is

²⁹ On the connections between Hindutva and the ‘new media’ landscape after 1991, see especially Brosius (2005) and Rajagopal (2001a).

somewhat crudely juxtaposed with the ‘economic geography’ of Nehruvian secular space (Deshpande, 2000, p. 184). The ‘national’ public sphere of secular civil society is characterised by the circulation of themes of ‘state-sponsored socialism, secularism and non-alignment’ – with communal practices relegated to the periphery (Deshpande, 2000, pp. 184-185).

Two problems arise here. First, regarding Deshpande’s proposed dichotomy between secular and communal spheres, historically and sociologically speaking there has been no such clear cut.³⁰ In a very real sense, Indian ‘secular’, ‘cosmopolitan’ nationalism has become about the desire to belong to a particular nation. At the same time as Hindutva emphasises Hindu culture as the common denominator for the ‘Indian way of life’, cosmopolitanism has become connected to ideas of cultural superiority (Brosius, 2010, p. 172). Second, Deshpande’s juxtaposition does not allow for articulation between so-called ‘economic’ and ‘sacred’ geographies. Deshpande’s argument, that ‘the “banalities” of local geographical loyalties disrupt the cosmopolitan ideal of ‘Nehruvian developmentalism’, then, collapses as soon as one acknowledges the fact that localised political movements depend on ‘non-local’ sources of power’ (Harvey, 2000, p. 543).

For example, while it must be remembered that India’s transition to neoliberalism has been premised on the retraction of Nehruvian socialist discourse and the ‘disarticulation’ of state-led development, as Manali Desai (2015, p. 152) points out, ‘the party that framed the terms of Nehruvian developmentalism [the Congress] was itself responsible for undertaking the first steps to dismantle this legacy’. Both the Congress and the BJP were instrumental in the move towards pro-business, pro-liberalisation politics. At the same time, market liberalisation was accompanied by the attempted political articulation and mobilisation of religious, caste and secular pro-poor

³⁰ This argument has been made *ad nauseum* by historians of the subcontinent. See for example Anderson (2013), Bhagavan (2008) and Vanaik (1997). I follow up on this train of thought in chapter three.

constituencies both “from above” and “from below” (Desai, 2015, pp. 13-15). Further still, in the Modi era, with its rhetoric of “good times”, neoliberal capitalism – dressed up in the garb of Hindutva – is articulated as the unchallengeable vehicle for the ambitions and urban aspirations of the Indian people (Kaur, 2015).

Indeed, the efforts of Hindutva forces in the Modi era have sought to align Hindutva politics on the ground with a new techno-friendly, high consumption vision of India configured around a ‘capitalist transformation of the nation form’ (Kaur, 2020). In this regard, the spatial strategy of Hindutva appears to be less about the production of ‘sacred space’ *per se* and more about the construction of a pro-liberalisation coalition of disparate constituencies, articulated around Hindutva themes of Hinduism and nationalism as a major political alternative to ‘secular’, ‘Nehruvian’ and ‘socialist’ themes long associated with the Congress (Desai, 2015).

Even so, it remains eminently possible to incorporate the concept of the banality of neighborliness into a materialist, political sociological angle of vision. Emphasis on the ‘banality’ of mundane, everyday experiences in relation to the production of ‘self-evident [religio-cultural] common sense’, forms a productive line of enquiry into the urban politics of Hindutva. Christophe Jaffrelot, for instance, has developed a nuanced understanding of the ‘saffronisation of the public sphere’. In a similar vein to Deshpande, he argues that under Modi a progressive ‘banalisation’ of Hindu nationalism taking place that increasingly permeates even the most mundane and trivial aspects of everyday life. India, Jaffrelot claims in dialogue with Edward Anderson, is moving in the direction of an ethno-democracy that increasingly rests on the sentiments of the Hindu majority (Anderson and Jaffrelot, 2018).³¹

³¹ Notably, this argument is congruent with Perry Anderson’s (2013) observations in *The Indian Ideology*.

Jaffrelot's point is significant to the extent that it couples together questions of nationalism, religion and urban experience without the strictures of 'heterotopic space.' What is needed, then, is an approach that accounts for the banality of neighbourlines – the importance of lived urban experience for the political articulation of Hindutva – that is sensitive to the dialectical production of nationalist politics, in relation to the logics of capitalist accumulation. Given the emphasis on the role of urban public space taken up within this thesis, of particular interest here is the work of Peter **Van Der Veer** (2015; 2016) on the connections between religion, locality and the 'postcolonial city'.

The production of locality

Goh and **Van der Veer** (2016, p. 367) lament that 'the relationship between the sacred and the urban remains understudied'. It is certainly true that as religious studies scholars, sociologists and political geographers continue to speak past each other, research into vernacular expressions of Hindutva that manifest in the politicisation and sacralisation of urban spaces is lacking.³² For Van der Veer, it is Marxist urban geographers that have done the most to advance the study of the city over the past several decades.³³ However, it is further suggested that Marxist analysis contains a problematic tendency to understand the relationship between the production of subjectivity and urban experience through theories of space and place.³⁴ The problem with this, argues Van der Veer, is that these thinkers do so at an unacceptably high level of abstraction. The argument is presented as follows: 'Marxist theory is too focused on both economic transformation and resistance to be able to come to grips with the variety of urban aspirations that are not directly related to class

³² Yet, see for instance **Brosius** (2010) and **Srivastava** (2015).

³³ This point has been strongly contested by scholars of 'postcolonial urbanism', the work of whom I discuss in depth in chapter two (2.4).

³⁴ Van der Veer points to the work of Andy **Merrifield** (2002) and his citation of Henri **Lefebvre's** (2003) *The Urban Revolution*.

or indeed the economy' (Van der Veer, 2015, p. 3). The important point to take away here, is that Hindutva is not usefully conceived of in the abstract. It must be analysed in terms of its historically particular geopolitical and vernacular expressions (see Anderson and Longkumer 2018).

By way of example, Van der Veer claims that while the work of David Harvey, demonstrates awareness of the 'situatedness' of urban struggles and the 'embodiment' of labour, 'he fails to leave aside his abstract Marxism for a closer view of the variety of urban aspirations' (Van de Veer, 2015. p. 4). While Van der Veer concedes that Marxist scholarship and its insights into the politics of space captures major elements of the larger picture of the urban process, he claims that it is shot through with a lack of attention to 'practical, everyday urban aspirations' and demonstrates a 'disinterest in an ethnography of micro-processes'. In consequence, Marxist approaches are deemed unsuitable for a rigorous analysis of the nexus between politics, religion and culture in the postcolonial city.

Yet, it is problematic to detach urban aspirations in the city from the reproduction of everyday life, in which capitalist social relations are the central aspect of the daily reproduction of human bodies. For example, consumerism itself has become a new ground for religiosity as urban life bumps up against the procedural logics of the state and capital (Nanda, 2009; Srivastava, 2017). The urban aspirations of Mumbaikars are increasingly mediated by religiosity, from the rendering of corporate culture around new interpretations of religious myths (see for example, Gooptu, 2017; Rudnyckyj, 2010) to, as we see in chapters four and five practices of cleanliness and the 'yogic way of life' respectively. I account for Van der Veer's critique in my own work through an ethnographic approach to the politics of Hindutva in the political street. In an attempt to bridge this gap in his own work, Van der Veer (2015, p. 2) instead turns his attention to conceptual work on the 'production

of locality' in the writings of anthropologist and social theorist Arjun Appadurai (1996).

For Appadurai, localities are not given but produced, as 'structures of feeling' within the broader context of political economy (Appadurai, 1996 p. 188; Van der Veer, 2015, p. 2). Offering a framework to examine 'the settings in and through which social life is produced', Appadurai's concern is with the role of locality in the context of the nation-state, in the face of increasing destabilisation under the pressures of global flows of capital, media, commodities and labour in the era of 'globalisation'. He takes specific interest in the 'production of local subjects' – pointing in particular to ceremonies and rituals of naming, segregation, embodied markers and symbols of religious devotion, as 'complex social techniques for the inscription of locality onto bodies' (Appadurai, 1996, p. 179). Accordingly, the materiality of 'the local' is produced through ongoing practice, as 'space and time are themselves localised through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation and action' (Appadurai, 1996, p. 179-181). Instructive as this may be, the effect is that the concrete abstraction of 'the economy' – or more precisely, of *capital* – is replaced by the floating abstraction of 'the local'.

The scholarship discussed above offers distinctive vantage points to understand how and why the ideology of Hindutva has become so effective after 2014. However, I claim that these approaches fail in what I take to be a central theoretical task of the thesis – to provide a conceptual framework to theorise the politics of Hindutva in the wider context of global political economy – in which the city of Mumbai is situated as a hub mediating global flows of capital, ideology, media, technology and people (see Appadurai, 1996). I base this on the simple premise that 'things do not exist outside the relationships to which they become constituted'.³⁵ Contemporary, creative and

³⁵ This point is made by Erik Swyngedouw. See 'Political Ecology and the Contested Politics of Urban Metabolism by Erik Swyngendouw', *You Tube*, 4 November 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5cLdosjnJY&t=952s>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

performative strategies of Hindutva politics work to generate a sense of (Hindu) imagined community through the colonisation of urban spaces. Considered as a 'means of articulation' the performative politics of Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga work to structure social cleavages and help 'usher' the social order of the Hindu rashtra into being (see de Leon, Desai and Tuğal, 2015, p. 4). With this set of claims in mind, let us turn to set out the conceptual framework of the thesis.

1.5 Hindutva imagined community and the political street: the conceptual framework

The nation, as Benedict Anderson (2006) argued, is an imagined political community that binds together those it deems citizens through the construction of a shared history and sovereign geography. The nation is *imagined* 'because even the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). This is not to say that the nation is fictional, but rather that it is the result of a particular unconscious style of abstract imagining. It is *limited* because it consists of 'finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations'; it is *sovereign* because the concept of the nation emerged as a legitimate means of political organisation in the context of Enlightenment and revolution against hierarchical dynastic rule (Anderson, 2006, p. 7).³⁶ The relevance of 'imagined community' for the Indian nation-state is reflected in the multiplicity of

³⁶ Anderson's concept of nationalism as a Western 'modular' form that has become universal has been criticised as Eurocentric. Anderson (2006, p. 4) noted that nationalism is 'modular, capable of being transplanted with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, [and being] merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations. Scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (1993;1996) have criticised this argument on the grounds that 'the nation' is not simply imagined from a modular (read: Western) form. The basic point here is that imagined community is imagined differently across different locales, and therefore not universal. Instead, it is a phenomenon that varies across time and space. While I take the point that anti-colonial nationalisms in the Indian context have imagined *their own* domains of sovereignty (Chatterjee, 1996, p. 217), I do not take Andersons concept as incompatible with the fact of socio-historical 'difference'. For a similar argument. On the compatibility of Marxism and analysis of Indian society, see Chibber, (2013). See also, chapter two (2.4).

linguistic and ethno-nationalist movements since independence that have drawn from the diversity of ethnic, social and historical memories of geopolitical community across the subcontinent.

Since 2014, the imagined political community of Hindutva has been discursively constructed by the Modi regime in often imprecise, ambiguous terms: through speeches, media, documentation and textbooks.³⁷ This thesis focuses on the role of the colonisation of urban public space in this process. Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga are accordingly considered as ‘means of articulation’ that bring together diverse constituents into the Hindutva project for the remaking of Indian state-society relations. The task of this section of the chapter, is to set the analytical lens of the thesis from the urban and the city as such, to the political street.

A central theoretical claim of the thesis, in this regard, is that the work of Asef Bayat (2010; 2017) provides a fruitful entry point to better understand how the politics of Hindutva crystallise through the theatrical, performative colonisation of urban public spaces. Though Bayat’s research is not south Asia specific, his observations and the constitutive elements of his work are far from compromised when the Middle Eastern cities at the centre of his analysis – Cairo, Istanbul and Tehran – are compared with cities of the Indian subcontinent. It is certainly true, for instance, that on any given working day in contemporary Mumbai

‘one is astounded by the presence of so many people operating in the streets – walking, running around, standing, sitting, negotiating, driving, or riding on buses and trains’ (Bayat, 2010, p. 12).

³⁷ See for example Sarkar (2019) and Thapar (2014) on the writing and teaching of history.

Across the megacities of the global south the street acts as a theatre of social conflict. It's the place where collective solidarities are formed, breakdown, are crystallised and extended. In the context of many cities of the south (and indeed beyond) the urban poor are 'compelled to operate, subsist, or simply live' in the streets and public spaces of the city. Accordingly, public space 'becomes an indispensable asset, for capital, for people to survive, operate and reproduce life (Bayat, 2017, p. 96). Though Mumbai is host to a wide range of communities bound by religion, caste and ethnic identities and a high degree of segregation by neighbourhood and area of the city exists, Mumbaikars notably remain bound by intertwined lives, common social intercourse and shared historical circumstances (see Bayat, 2010, p. 12).

Geographers of urban India have pointed out the particularities of 'difference' that constitute the social profile of Indian cities (Derickson, 2014; Parnell and Robinson, 2012; Robinson, 2015; Roy, 2015). Bombay/Mumbai is radically heterogeneous but at the same time marked by segregations around what Jim Masselos (1991) called 'collective accustomed space'. Through socio-spatial practices – festivals and parades, aesthetic, culinary, religious and caste-based practices etc – social groups colonise urban space Masselos (1991, p. 39).³⁸ Mumbai can in this light be understood as a tightly woven urban socio-spatial landscape: quiet, upmarket, upper caste dominated residential streets connect to Hindu-dominated markets. These spaces coexist with the multiplicity of Muslim *mohallas* (Contractor, 2017b), lower-caste dominated 'slums' (Sharma, 2000) and Dalit quarters (Solanki, 2016) that constitute the spaces of the city – each example represents an engagement in the production of accustomed space. In this context, while the 'actual' street in concrete form is constituted by difference as much as solidarity and community, the concept of the political street allows us to focus on the means of articulation that aim to

³⁸ Collective accustomed space is defined as 'a perception of urban space derived through accustomed activity and accustomed time' (Masselos, 1991, p. 39). See also Rahman (2019); Green (2019); Solanki (2016).

produce an imagined political community of Hindus out of the heterogeneity of urban public space.

First of all, to better understand the dynamics of the political street, it is critical to note the fact that India's everyday urban public spaces have definable gendered limits. Despite its relatively 'cosmopolitan' character Mumbai is of course no exception. This is not to say that women are in anyway absent or invisible. Indeed, the sight of women living and hustling on the streets of Mumbai, riding the city's auto-rickshaws, buses and trains, working in retail and corporate jobs and moving through the city's markets and malls is unremarkable. Yet even upper caste young professional women are well aware of the need to keep their wits about them. The city is very different place at night for women regardless of social status and class positionality (see Butcher, 2017; Phadke et al, 2011; Roy and Ong, 2011). The bodies that animate the political street are thus in the main, unmistakably male.

In addition to recognising its gendered composition, when we talk about the political street we have to connect concrete spatial concerns to the ways in which communication increasingly connects with media saturation. As Bayat (2010, pp. 12-13) points out, given the density of modern cities and the rise of advanced communication technologies, the political street is the place *par excellence* for the formation of collective grievances. Access to cheap mobile data and the proliferation of low-cost handsets means that India's internet population is largely 'mobile'.³⁹ As a result, digital gadgets – primarily smart phones – have become an increasingly visible part of everyday life in urban India. In this context, feelings and notions of belonging can swiftly generate 'extensive forging of sectarian, albeit "distanciated" communities along ethnic or religious lines' (Bayat, 2010, p. 13). While social media can effectively aggregate multiple logics of resistance and dissent in public space (Juris, 2012;

³⁹ See, BBC News. 2019. 'Mobile data: Why India has the world's cheapest', *BBC News*, 18 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-47537201>, last accessed 15 June 2020.

see also Rao, 2020) it also serves as a catalyst for the organisation, mobilisation and dissemination of BJP propaganda.

In short, then, the political street intersects with social and mainstream media terrains. Accordingly, I argue with Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey that in this context ‘it is possible to transmit messages relentlessly to very large sections of the population, as Modi and [the BJP] know well’ (Doron and Jeffrey, 2018, p. 27). The widespread emergence of smart phones in India has profoundly affected the everyday social practices and connectivity of citizens (Doron and Jeffrey, 2013, pp. 2-10). With the financialisation of big data that characterises neoliberal ‘platform capitalism,’⁴⁰ platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have simultaneously become platforms for BJP propaganda.⁴¹ I show that in the case of Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga, BJP media strategy draws energy from the political street.

The iconography of ‘Brand Modi’ here is critical. While still Chief Minister of Gujarat, during the 2007 Gujarat state election campaign, Modi underwent a physical makeover, swapping his low-key stylisation as RSS organiser (*paracharak*) for that of well-groomed fashionista to position him as a modern, pragmatic “youth icon” (see figure 2). This coincided with the strategic consolidation of his ‘development man’ (*vikas purush*) persona. ‘Brand Modi’ is at the centre of the aesthetic modernisation of the BJP.⁴² Modi’s savvy use of social media platforms has placed him firmly as a man ahead of his times, and his team skilfully use platforms such as Twitter (from

⁴⁰ At ‘the most general level’ platforms are digital infrastructures that position themselves as intermediaries to enable different users – ‘customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects’ to interact. These platforms more often than not allow users to ‘build their own products, services and market places’ (Srnicek, 2017, p. 43).

⁴¹ While most Indian political parties now enjoy a substantial social media presence, the BJP have since at least 2012 largely outflanked other parties. In large part this situation has risen out of the popularity of Narendra Modi and his social media savvy campaigning.

⁴² As Subir Sinha notes, BJP social media strategy is accordingly highly sophisticated. For instance, themes and terms used in Modi’s 2014 election campaign speeches were crowd sourced from posts, memes and comments collated from BJP social forums and platforms (Sinha, 2018, pp. 4165-4167).

2012) to reach out to Indian youth.⁴³ Affinity and interaction with Bollywood stars and cricketers paired with explicit endorsement of youth culture and themes, have earned him millions of followers, re-tweets and massively boosted his popularity.⁴⁴ Modi's image straddles twin narratives: on the one hand he is presented as representative of traditional values and on the other, he is the face of a 'new' techno-friendly globalised India (Pal, 2015, p. 379). At the same time, the effect has been to associate Modi with Hindu cultural themes and paint other political leaders (Rahul Gandhi in particular) as aloof and out of touch (Sinha, 2018, p. 4169).



Figure 2: Brand Modi: from RSS man and Chief Minister of Gujarat (2001-2014) to fashion forward PM and world leader (2014- present).

Following the smartphone revolution,⁴⁵ cyberspace has progressively suffused public space; electronic media play an increasingly key role in the production of the public sphere. If according to Marshall Berman (1982, p. 196) the 'essential purpose' of the street is 'sociability and communication', then in contemporary neoliberal conditions, following the proliferation of mobile devices/smart phones as powerful mediums of communication and information flows, media space and urban space increasingly conjoin (see Mcquire, 2008, p. 132). What this means is that mobile and social media

⁴³ See for instance the ongoing propaganda/spin campaign on Twitter led by the BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya. See Chaudhuri (2020).

⁴⁴ At the time of writing, compared to other world leaders, Modi (61.8 million) is currently only behind Barack Obama (122.1 million) and Donald Trump (85.7 million) in terms of Twitter followers.

⁴⁵ See Hands (2019) as well as Seymour (2019) with special reference to Twitter.

information flows connect to urban public space and can influence and organise spatial practices in various ways. The political street, then, is as much a space of technology, communication, and organisation as it is gendered and predominantly ‘male’. As we will see, further still, the concept of the political street is particularly apposite for our analysis given that well over half Mumbai’s population live in densely packed “slums” and on the pavements, living their days pursuing livelihoods out in the open.⁴⁶

Mumbai: the city ‘*in extremis*’

Mumbai is firmly characterised by ‘pavement culture’ where street vendors, informal labourers, municipal workers, beggars and street children merge within a multi-faceted street-based outdoor economy. This in turn results in many affluent urban professionals mixing into the dynamics of the informal economy and worlds of the urban poor in the streets on a regular basis. Taking Bayat’s cue that the street is the primary venue of politics and social conflict, it is thereby reasonable to claim that the street is inherently political. For communities that inhabit the streets, efforts are made to territorialise urban space. Social cleavages of class, caste and religion play a most important role. Mobilisation in the political street can in this light be understood as the production of ‘collective accustomed space’ (Masseios, 1991, p. 39). This relates to the circulation of symbols and signs, but also to embodied spatial practices (Gökariksel, 2009).

This emphasis on political struggle and the street as a vital space where social antagonisms play out compliments the work of Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre approached questions of politics in a dialectical *relational* mode, placing simultaneous emphasis on the ‘universalising tendencies’ of commodification and ‘moments of utopian possibility manifested within the contradictions of

⁴⁶ There is some controversy around the usage of the term ‘slum’. See Gilbert (2007). The term is deployed throughout this thesis to denote the vast informal settlements in Mumbai, on the basis that the term used regularly by officials, NGOs and many ‘slum dwellers’ themselves.

everyday life' (Kipfer, 2002, p. 126). In Lefebvre's (2003) account, late-capitalist 'everyday life' is the stage on which sociopolitical contradictions play themselves out. In the case of Mumbai, these logics and patterns have animated accounts of the 'maximum city' (Mehta, 2004). Alive and bustling, Mumbai is a city 'in extremis' where the "crowd" is a synecdoche for the city itself (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 15). In this context, the primary venue for sociability and communication is the political street.

In capitalist conditions, ancient symbolisms and views of the world, either in present form as works of art, architectural expressions and religious iconography, or as received language, symbolism and representation, are 'stripped of all value' (Marx, 2015). Following Marx, Lefebvre argues that 'deprived of symbols' men [sic] 'feel they are at the mercy of things, of signals, of sounds (Lefebvre, 1995, p. 181).⁴⁷ The logic of capital results in 'the devastating conquest of the lived by the conceived, by abstraction' (Lefebvre, 2006, p. 10). As land and labour are commodified, historical space is secularised and stripped of its symbolic content and ritual. Accordingly, it is 'the market' as opposed to 'the ceremonial site becomes the primary locus of social activity' (Wilson, 2013, p. 368). In this context

'each symbol acts as an affective and organic nucleus. It is not an innate archetype from the depths of time or being, nor is it a myth or some obscure existentialist matrix. It is a perceptible and perceived reality, the centre of a cycle and a socio-cosmic rhythm: the nucleus of family life, the

⁴⁷ It is here that we can most clearly see the influence of Martin Heidegger on Lefebvre's thought. In Heidegger's terminology *Alltäglicht*, or 'Everydayness' is the space of custom, daily concerns and 'idle talk' (*gerede*). At different points in his work Lefebvre cites Heidegger's idea of "poetic dwelling" positively and it is highly significant within his concept of the lived experience of everyday life. As Adam Sharr (2007, pp. 2-3) notes, 'Heidegger mounts a broad critique of the technocratic western world, a call to arms, to reintegrate building with dwelling and the making of place with the activities and qualities of its habitation'. In this regard, the concept of everyday life should be seen as the application of Marx's notion of alienation to Heidegger's concept of everydayness: 'everyday life is such that man is alienated' (Elden, 2004, p. 113).

centre of the activity of the group throughout the day, the week or the year' (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 347).

Mumbaikars 'remake the city and their world in countless ways' (Prakash, 2008, p. 12) as everyday urban experience confronts public cultural mediums, from cinema to mainstream and social media, artistic expression, public events and popular music. Yet simultaneously, the neoliberal city is moulded by elite desires to improve competitiveness, capital flow, and to marketise and develop spaces of social existence in the interests of capital. The neoliberal city fosters technocratic governance, policy and institutionalised politics. But it is also a space of political articulation. Amidst the radical heterogeneity of society, political parties bind together the 'constituents of the social'; narratives of imagined political community become successful through effective articulation (de Leon, Desai and Tuğal, 2015, pp. 26-27). It is in this context that I argue that the territoriality of urban space effectively dissolves through the creative and performative theatricality of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga, as diverse strata of Mumbai society come together in the production of an imagined political community of Hindus.

Hindutva is not, therefore, crudely reproduced in a passive and purely aesthetic way. It is active and well organised political project with historically specific means of articulation at its disposal. Through the spectacular and performative theatricality of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga urban public spaces of the city are 'colonised'. Henri Lefebvre used the term 'colonisation' to denote twin processes of the saturation of everyday life by capital and as the organisation of hierarchical territorial relations by the state. Understood in a strictly technical sense – the political organisation of space rather than a delimited category of European territorial expansion – 'colonisation' theorises the political organisation of territorial relations and state strategies of producing space (Kipfer and Goonewardena, 2013, p. 2013). Through analysis of Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga, this thesis aims to show that Narendra Modi's BJP operates at the

level of the urban to (however incompletely) organise the hierarchical separation of social space and ‘forge unity out of disparity’ in and through the political street (see de Leon, Desai and Tuğal, 2015, p. 27).

The political street, then, is an appropriate reference point from which to examine the politics of Hindutva in the neoliberal city. It is in the streets of the city; on the pavements; street corners and public transport; in the shops and parks and squares, that public opinions and common sentiments converge. The streets function as the interface of media and public space and primary spaces of sociability and communication. Everyday experiences in the political street extend beyond the physicality of the concrete to ‘signify crucial symbolic utterances [...] and convey collective sentiments of nation and community’ (Bayat, 2010, p. 13; 2017, p. 105). Simply put, the lens of the political street focuses on the role of cultural production in the formation of social consent, self-identification and collective solidarity in urban public spaces. In the chapters that follow, I show that the precision of this analysis sheds light on Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga in relation to the strategic-political objectives of Hindutva. The utility of this framework rests in its ability to capture the politics Hindutva within the urban rhythms of neoliberalism.

1.6 Methodological reflections and case study selection

This section of the chapter sets out to address some of the challenges faced in the writing of this thesis through a discussion of questions of method, epistemology and case study selection. There are multiple possible ways of approaching the question of how the ideology of Hindutva crystallises and becomes effective through the colonisation of the political street. Yet in any research project a methodological framework must be established. The politics of Hindutva are often discussed as if predicated upon a set of ideological positions that can be readily applied across India’s expansive cultural and

regional geography, including the multiple geographies of the Indian diaspora. I claim that it makes little sense to speak of Hindutva in separation from the social contexts in which it percolates (see Anderson and Longkumer, 2018, Blom Hansen, 1996). What follows is thus an attempt to make sense of a particular geographical variation of the connections between nationalist politics, religio-cultural expression and the political street, in relation to a more general process of capitalist accumulation and social struggle (Harvey, 2006, p. 78).

The initial thinking driving the research proposal for this work was to analyse Hindutva in comparative perspective with the Islamic-nationalist Milli Görüş ('National View') movement in Turkey.⁴⁸ In the early stages of the research, I prepared a paper comparing the social bases of religious nationalism in India and Turkey, to be presented at a PhD workshop of the Historical Sociology and International Relations working group of the British International Studies Association at the University of Sussex. In this paper I asked how religious nationalists came to act as the principle agents of cultural production and community welfare in Bombay and Istanbul in the 1990s? And how in this climate, marginalised social groups voiced dissent and articulated matters of social justice? Though the paper was well received, criticism was forthcoming regarding the level of abstraction the argument was pitched at. These comments exposed me to the pitfalls of my comparative approach. In the main, the workshop raised a number of questions for me regarding to how I might try and capture how political strategy taps into the richness of everyday experience, beyond an attempt to draw parallels across to separate instances of far-right politics. I decided that this strategy ran the risk of superficiality and generalisation at the expense of contextual detail.

⁴⁸ Though the primary focus would remain Hindutva, this idea was developed through engagement with Aijaz Ahmad's (1995, p. 26) critique of the propensity of scholars to eschew comparative research and consider Indian politics as 'unique' and the alarming frequency in which discussions of Indian sociopolitical and economic development are organised along a 'singular axis' of colonialism/postcolonialism.

Though there are fascinating parallels between the Indian and Turkish experiences there are also some huge differences. In the context of my own research, I felt that I had been spending a lot of time trying to fit the two experiences together, as opposed to examining either case in sufficient depth. After initially registering this experience as a failure in my research design, through supervision and in dialogue with colleagues I realised that the exchanges in Sussex were invaluable. Despite the rich possibilities of the comparative angle I had proposed, at this stage in my efforts as a scholar – and in pursuit of doctoral research – it became clear to me that it would be more fruitful to draw illustrative comparisons to the politics of Hindutva to support my argument. It would be important to situate the Indian experience in the wider context of global political economy, but more so, to deliver on depth, detail and substance through explication of a single core case study. I return to this comparison in some depth in chapter six.

Lurking within the argument outlined in the previous sections, is the question of case study selection and why the case studies of Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga were chosen in the first place? In a bid to register the politics of Hindutva with everyday urban experience, I began an initial foray into the world of Indian cricket.⁴⁹ In his seminal book on cricket and Empire, *Beyond a Boundary* (2005), C.L.R James lampoons the absurdity of histories of England that omit Victorian England's most popular and influential character, the eminent cricketer W.G Grace. A similar observation can be made about India. After all, cricket, as Ashis Nandy (1989) famously put it, 'is an Indian game accidentally discovered by the British'. How, in this light, one might feasibly ask, can the modern history of Indian nationalism be understood without reference to Sachin Tendulkar? Mass spectator sport in a media saturated age is of course intimately connected with expressions of

⁴⁹ There is a wide-ranging literature on nationalism and cricket in India. See in particular, Guha (2002) and Nandy (1989).

recognition, pride and national identity. National sports are popular cultural forms that shape individual and collective opinions and world-views (Barthes, 2007). James' argument for the importance of popular culture to political analysis is an attempt to grapple with the question of what makes people tick: 'what do men [sic] live by?' (James, 2019). Given my aim to identify terrains of everyday social relations in the city through which nationalist identity and meaning is actively produced, cricket appeared to be an appropriate target.

However, as my research into the formation of Hinduism and social history of Hindutva deepened, I began to uncover key themes – of the disciplined Hindu body, moral community/caste hierarchy and the idea of Hinduism as a world-dynamic force – in the reproduction of Hindutva. I elaborate on these themes at length in chapter two (2.1). As the research progressed, I began to feel that these insights were being lost through an extended foray into the politics of sport and nationalism. Taking 'cricket nationalism' as a main focus of the research, however fruitful in its own right, would have run the risk of altering the coordinates of the thesis entirely. In this light, I decided that the case studies should a) connect directly to the activities of the Modi regime, b) directly relate to the reproduction of the themes I had identified through historical excavation, and c) generate sufficient evidence to test the primary arguments of the thesis.⁵⁰ Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga are exemplary cases of the performance of the nation in the street. They reflect service to the nation through public sanitation, health and spiritual cleanliness of the body respectively.

Epistemology, fieldwork and sources

It is evidently true that social research and the production of knowledge that results is never value-neutral. The intellectual curiosity underpinning this

⁵⁰ This set of criteria was adapted from a PhD thesis prepared by Richard Seymour (2016, p. 84) at the London School of Economics.

research came from a three-month trip to India in 2014. Following the recent rise to power of Narendra Modi, many of the people I met expressed jubilation that India was poised to find its place in the world. Equally, many I engaged with spoke with trepidation and fear about the rise of ‘fascist’ Hindu nationalism in a country they believed was secular and liberal to the core. The prospect of a seemingly resurgent Hindutva in relation to the rising ‘populist wave’ battering liberal democracies elsewhere in the world, piqued an interest I decided could be fruitfully pursued through doctoral research. The thesis that follows is thus an interpretive project that is mediated by my own experience as much as my own political views. Taking this into consideration, it is fair to say that my approach has been guided by a rejection of the communalism of the RSS-BJP and a political commitment to the annihilation of caste in solidarity with Indian progressives.

Based on the research questions guiding the present research, I decided that the methods employed should be qualitative in nature. The conceptual framework outlined above is animated by qualitative methods of ‘thick’ description, photography, informal, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. While it could be argued that that this approach occludes potentially fruitful quantitative approaches to the production of knowledge, it is my theoretical wager that the complexities of how political consciousness crystallises are best approached in a relational, dialectical manner (Bayat, 2010; Harvey, 1989; 1994; 2007; 2008; Kipfer and Goonewardena, 2013; Lefebvre, 2003; 2014; Teltumbde, 2018; Wilson, 2013).

As was discussed briefly in section 1.2 of this chapter, this thesis advances a historical argument to better understand the production of imagined community through the colonisation of urban public space in the political streets of Bombay/Mumbai. In the early stages of the research – to the extent that chapter three forms the historical backbone of the thesis – an element of archival work was undertaken in the India Office Records (IOR) at the British

Museum in London, beginning in May 2019 and ending in July 2019. This material included pamphlets, articles, letters and correspondence produced by the Indian National Congress. As well as judicial and police reports, letters and correspondence produced by the apparatus of British colonial rule. In addition to close study of the many rich works that focus on the social history of Bombay, the aim here was to build a picture for myself of the shifting social relations and nationalist politics of space that defined anti-colonial nationalism in Bombay during the late-colonial period. Additionally, chapter three draws extensively from the oral history of the Bombay mill districts collected in the edited volume *One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices* (2005) which was also consulted between May and July 2019. This helped gain a picture of the everyday life of communist Bombay that was guided and contextualised by the narratives of political struggle voiced by the mill workers themselves.

A range of secondary sources were also consulted through the period of researching the thesis in order to build as broad a picture of the subject matter as possible. Thus, in addition to consulting various government, non-government and project specific documents (on Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga), special reference was made to the work of scholars of Indian politics and Hindutva such as Aijaz Ahmad (2004; 2015), B.R Ambedkar (1946; 2014; 2016), Chetan Bhatt (1997; 2001), Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (1994; 1998; 2009), Manali Desai (2012; 2015; 2016), Thomas Blom Hansen (1999; 2001), Christophe Jaffrelot (1996; 2007) and Anand Teltumbde (2005; 2018). I also made extensive use of the materials and holdings at the British Library, University of London's Senate House and the South Asia collections at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Additionally, I spent a significant amount of time online and in the library at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) looking through the newspaper archives of the *Times of India*, editions of *Economic & Political Weekly*, *The Caravan* and back catalogues of independent news websites *Scroll.in*,

Outlook, *India Today* and *The Wire*, searching and reading for opinion and commentary on Swachh Bharat, the politics of yoga and Hindutva in general. Many conversations with students and staff at TISS greatly enhanced this work.

Chapters four and five were primarily based on fieldwork conducted in Mumbai between November 2019 and February 2020. It is worth taking a bit of space to discuss this process in detail. The aim of undertaking the fieldwork element of the research was to attempt to answer my research question(s) by employing my selected set of methods, as opposed to simply interpreting what I found and then trying to filter it back through the conceptual framework outlined above. Instead, I looked to approach the research process and importance of ‘doing theory’ as an open-ended structure of argumentation, that would be ‘sensitive to encounters with the complex ways in which social processes are materially embedded in the web of life’ (Harvey, 2006, p. 78). Following a reading of David Harvey’s writings on his approach to research methodology, I decided that my aim should be to make sure that my approach to political sociology would be ‘informed and advanced by case study work’ and not the other way around (see Harvey, 2006, pp. 78-79).

Researching the subject of Hindutva in contemporary India raises a series of problems, not least the fact that the current regime is characterised by a profoundly anti-intellectual disposition. Freedom of expression, dissident intellectual culture and that which the RSS-BJP deems to be ‘anti-national’ activity is not tolerated. Media outlets, scholars and universities have been subject to censorship, repression and violence. At the extreme end of the spectrum, open critics of Hindutva, from the social activist and writer Narendra Dabholkar, to the journalist-activist Gauri Lankesh, have been murdered in cold blood by individuals close to the Sangh Parivar. With regards to my own research, following the growing anti-intellectual culture in the country and attempts by the government to suppress international

criticism, the process of obtaining an Indian research visa was a difficult process. Visas are frequently denied – or simply kicked into the long grass – on the grounds that proposals relate to issues deemed politically sensitive. Additionally, people ‘deviating’ from their declared intentions while in India, in particular those participating in activism and/or protest, have had their visas revoked with immediate effect.⁵¹ In my own case, after considerable difficulties and a very long wait, a simplified and watered-down version of my research visa proposal was eventually accepted.

As a consequence, during my time in Mumbai – which coincided with mass anti-government protests connected to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act – I was forced to tread carefully and attempt to avoid contention, lest I compromise the opportunity to conduct research in the field. Additionally, due to the politically sensitive nature of my subject matter, I opted for a strategy of not openly advertising the content of a research project that would undoubtedly be deemed ‘anti-national’. On the ground, I spent a significant amount of time with the various beach clean-up movements in the city; learning from and working with activists concerned with the issue of manual scavenging; and at The Yoga Institute at Santa Cruz.

Over eight consecutive weekends I visited various beach clean-up movements at Dadar, Mahim and Versova. I took part in the clean ups, conducted observations, wrote field notes and took photographs. From time to time, in place of general conversation, informal interviews were conducted with various beach volunteers. Interviewees were selected on the basis of their proximity to the beach clean-up movements and their status as ‘volunteers’.

⁵¹ For example, Jakob Lindenthal, a German exchange student studying at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) at Chennai, was effectively deported for joining anti-CAA protests and posting critical opinions about the legislation on social media. The official explanation was that he had violated the terms of his visa. During my time in Mumbai at the Tata Institute of the Social Sciences (TISS) several warnings were sent to foreign students via email and I was warned personally by International Relations Office staff to stay away from all protests or ‘face the consequences’.

In the end, I also managed to get close access to the people at the centre of Mahim Beach Clean-up. Informal interviews took place with Indraneil Sengupta and Rabia Tewari, the founders of Mahim Beach Clean-up after two of the weekend clean-ups. Regarding the research into manual scavenging and Swachh Bharat semi-structured interviews with SKA activists took place over a series of several weeks. Again, the aim was to speak to people that had knowledge of manual scavenging and the status of sanitation workers on the ground. I also accompanied these activists to a BMC sanitation worker meeting in south Mumbai. The meeting doubled as the launch of *Kaamgar Patrika* magazine. Here I was able to field questions towards and informally interview several sanitation workers working in the district. I also accompanied SKA activists to investigate the 2019 Govandi death case, where I further interviewed the activists I had been in contact with. For reasons of anonymity and safety of the activists their names have been changed within the thesis (see page 7). In all cases of interview – informal or semi-structured, my project was explained, and consent forms designed by the Birkbeck College Graduate Research School were issued.

My research at The Yoga Institute was based on taking part in a one week ‘Yogic way of life’ course. However, in the context of being surrounded by avid supporters of Narendra Modi, I confined myself to talking about Indian yoga and the international day of yoga over political questions. Observation was aimed at the production of thick description. While I did more formally interview the director of the Institute, Hansa Yogendra, this was done on the basis of finding out more about how it operates, its curriculum and its outreach activities without broaching politically sensitive questions. After the course had finished I continued to attend the Institute every Wednesday for a yoga class and attended the morning Satsang (Sunday morning gathering and prayers) several times before I left Mumbai. While it could be argued that elements of my engagement over the course of the fieldwork conducted at the Yoga Institiye was insincere, my response is to simply assert that it would have

been impossible to conduct the research openly and brazenly given the current political climate.

In terms of ‘method’, then, it could be said that the material generated through these streams of research loosely fits with the principles of ethnography. This aspect of the research resembles what Clifford Geertz (1973) famously called thick description. To avoid the reproduction of overly empirical ‘menial observations’, my aim was to develop an interpretative methodology with a commitment to historical circumstances, clarification and contextual detail. Additionally, in a bid to capture, record and communicate ‘thick descriptions’ of my subject matter, photography, images and film were brought into the ambit of the research (see Kharel, 2015). Taken as a whole, the methodological approach of the thesis can be classified as an attempt to present a ‘thick’ description of events composed of facts, data, images and information, but one that also consists of observation, commentary and interpretation. As will hopefully become clear in what follows, the ultimate aim has been to produce an argument that is at once historical, contextual and relational.

Even so, my experience conducting fieldwork in Mumbai raised a set of problems that I had not anticipated. Most important to me was the problem of unequal social relations between myself and the activist-researchers I engaged with in the city. Regarding chapter four, the research process involved engaging with activists and organisations working on the issue of manual scavenging. The perspectives, narratives and stories of many of these activists – and my experiences while tagging along with them as a researcher – have contributed immensely to the production of this thesis. My access to knowledge and the first-hand experiences I gained were almost entirely brokered by others. Yet, problematically, these researchers, activists and workers are rendered more or less invisible – apart for when directly quoted within an interview or field note – within the text that follows. It is thus important to clarify the role of others in facilitating and influencing the

orientation of my own research in Mumbai. I also feel that it is important to take heed of the spirit of collaboration offered to me by the activist-scholars that I worked alongside, in a bid to make myself and the knowledge I have generated through research useful in the fight against caste discrimination and manual scavenging.⁵² Collaborative work is in the pipeline and the relationships and friendships that I made continue to flourish. My hope is that this goes some way towards offsetting my own (selfish) interest going to Mumbai, namely, the pursuit of doctoral research.

Second, having thought out the research design of the project while based in London, my aim in Mumbai was to immerse myself in the general political climate and investigate the politics of Swachh Bharat and yoga for myself. However, in the event, the methods I selected were altered and negotiated through engagement with the subject matter of research while in the field. When it came to seeking people to speak with and informally interview, social media (Twitter in particular) ended up becoming an important tool to discover the when and where of what was going on in Mumbai regarding the activities and events relevant to my research. Social media also allowed me to get in touch with and track the beach clean-up movements discussed in chapter four and their role in the environmental activism in the city. What I didn't expect, was the propensity of the beach clean-up movements to regularly 'post' or 'Tweet' opinions and political statements on social media. This ended up generating a significant amount of material that I would go on to use to support my arguments. In a similar way, increased engagement with social media channels led me to pay much more attention to the social media

⁵² For an excellent discussion of the problems associated with 'brokering researchers' – and a guide to where I have taken my cues on the matter – see the article 'Moving Out of the Backstage: How Can We Decolonize Research?' *Disorder of Things*, 22 October 2019, <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2019/10/22/moving-out-of-the-backstage-how-can-we-decolonize-research/>, last accessed 12 May 2020. I take a further cue here from activist-scholars such as bell hooks who have, for example, urged researchers to consider spaces outside the confines of academic exchange as venues for the publication of work, free of 'high abstraction' and obscure, 'jargonistic language' with the aim of engaging a wider public (hooks, 1994, 64).

strategy of the office of Narendra Modi, again yielding fruitful material to support the arguments of the thesis in chapters four and five.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter two offers preliminary definitions in a bid to serve conceptual clarity around key terms deployed within the thesis. To begin with I run through the historical formation of Hinduism, in order to proffer a definition of Hindutva and its relation to Hinduism. The crux of the argument is that the Hindu ‘chain of reasoning’ established as the *defacto* culture of Indian national identity during the late-colonial period continues to shape nationalist politics in the present. The chapter then turns to sketch out a brief history of Indian neoliberalism. Here I focus on the transition from a Fordist economy of industrial production to one of flexible neoliberal accumulation that characterises the contemporary city. In particular, by mapping the Great Textile Strike of 1982-83 and corresponding shift from mills to malls (or rather, Bombay to Mumbai). By tracing the transformation of social worlds wrought by neoliberalism and its discontents after 1980, I set the scene for critical analysis of contemporary performative strategies of Hindutva politics (Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga) in chapters four and five. Finally, the chapter accounts for the role of the Indian National Congress as an enabling force in the resurgence of Hindutva politics after 1980. I do so with reference to the political articulation of ‘soft’ Hindutva politics by the Congress as a means to stay relevant in the post-Nehruvian, neoliberal era.

Chapter three examines the formation of the political street between India and Empire, with special reference to the historical relationship between Hinduism, nationalism and the city. To better understand why the ideology of Hindutva is so effective, I examine the role of Ganpati Utsava, nationalist civil disobedience in the city, and the Bombay communist movement in the formation of the political street. My argument is that these three movements

represent a theatrical colonisation of urban public space, forged between anti-colonialism and exclusionary Hindu nationalism that continues to resonate in the present. The chapter, then, maps a history of mass politics in the city to show how a Hindu chain of reasoning has shaped performance of the nation in the street from everyday religious ritual, to the overtly political, from the late-colonial period to the present. The overall contribution of this chapter to the thesis is to offer historical and sociological context to the means of articulation (Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga) analysed in chapters four and five. Taken together, chapters two and three prepare the ground for an examination of ‘new’ strategies of Hindutva politics that converge in the performance of the nation in the street in contemporary Mumbai.

Chapters four and five offer detailed case studies Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga respectively. Chapter four develops an analysis of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in Mumbai as a pivotal aspect in the political strategy of Hindutva forces to transfigure India into the Hindu rashtra. I argue that the underlying motivations of Swachh Bharat are twofold: the better management of urban space and reinforcement of caste-based Hindu social order. Critically, these motivations generate a sense of imagined political community that centres on the idea of a resurgent Hindu nation and operates through the colonisation of urban space by Hindutva. To substantiate these claims, the chapter examines how the politics of Hindutva become effective through the metabolisation of bourgeois environmentalist practices and incorporation of the reconstituted practice of manual scavenging into the coherent narrative of a ‘Clean India’. These practices, I argue, are combined into a powerful politics of spatial purification, as the Gandhian discourse that ‘cleanliness is next to godliness’ is appropriated and shaped to generate a mass performance of the nation tied to the politico-theistic ambitions of the BJP.

In chapter five, I extend the analysis of the performance of the nation in the street to the International Day of Yoga. Under the leadership of Narendra

Modi, the RSS-BJP have decisively moved to claim yoga for Hindutva. On the one hand, the Sangh has moved to standardise yoga as reflective of Hindutva values, and on the other, commandeer globalised neoliberal lifestyle choices and bodily desires— of health, physical fitness and holistic wellness – into the Hindutva project. As a result, Hindutva forces piggyback on the global popularity of yoga to produce a spectacular sense of imagined political community that pivots on the colonisation of urban public spaces. Through promotion of an increasingly standardised, patriotic yoga; dissemination of Hindutva-friendly values through the International Day of Yoga; and propagation of the narrative of India as ‘Vishwa Guru’ (spiritual guide) to the world, Indian (read: Hindu) national pride and being-in-the-world is underscored. Ultimately, then, this chapter shows how the politics of Hindutva intersect with the global commodification of yoga and the late-colonial imaginary of Hinduism as a ‘world-dynamic’ force to generate a sense of imagined political community at home.

Chapter six, the concluding chapter of the thesis, takes some space to recap and elaborate on the primary argument and key themes of the thesis – that performance of the nation in the street is a critical part of the political strategy for the realisation of the RSS project, where what matters is not the facts, but the fictional consistency of the narrative. Subsequently, I return to the existing literature set out in chapter one and mark out how the thesis has contributed to scholarly discussion. Next, I offer some concluding thoughts and opinions with special reference to the question of shortcomings, unresolved areas and openings for future research. Recalling the context and significance of the thesis, I end by considering potential sources of counter-politics in the political street. Finally, I place this examination of ‘new’ strategies of Hindutva politics that converge in the performance of the nation in the street in global and comparative perspective.

Chapter two

Preliminary definitions: Hindutva, neoliberalism and Congress decline as enabling force

‘Amorphous and protean, Hinduism cannot be used for prolonged political mobilization on confessional grounds alone, as the BJP has discovered; whatever primeval furies it evokes must be combined with rational calculations based on other factors, such as class and caste loyalties’.

- Pankaj Mishra (2013b, p. 142)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sketches out a set of concepts and definitions that are put to work within the thesis by drilling down to discuss the key themes elaborated in chapter one. The focus is on definitions of Hindutva, Indian neoliberalism and the enabling role of the Congress in the rise of Hindutva politics. At the same time, I tell a story of Hindutva, neoliberalism and the decline of the Indian National Congress as key to the formation of the contemporary political street. Altogether, the chapter supports the argument that at the same time as Hindutva has become the *defacto* culture of the nation, it has become a critical means of political articulation of both the Sangh and the Congress against neoliberalism and its discontents.

I begin by mapping the relationship between Hinduism as a religio-cultural system and the formation of a singular, unitary Hinduism in conjunction with the emergence of Indian nationalist thought (2.2). I focus in particular on the significance of Orientalism and primordial understandings of ‘the nation’ in the historical formation of these social categories. Subsequently, I discuss how Hindutva draws aspects of a singular, unitary Hinduism into a historically specific articulation of nationalist politics (2.3). I then shift gear to argue that

India is very much a part of global trends in the uneven extension of neoliberal capitalist development. To this end, I offer a definition of Indian neoliberalism as a 'slow and cautious' political project for the reconstitution of ruling class, upper caste power (see Desai, 2012, p. 29; Harvey, 2005). In doing so, I also show that the history and logics of capitalist accumulation cannot be disconnected from the politics of social development and lived patterns of everyday life that shape urban India, with special reference to Mumbai (2.4). Finally, I take some space to elaborate the role of the Congress party after 1980 in the positioning of Hindutva as *defacto* culture of the nation in the context of Indian neoliberalism (2.5). Despite the seeming complexity of this arrangement, the present chapter has a modest aim. What follows is not an attempt to capture the origins and development of Hindutva in all its complexity. Nor is it to provide a narrative history around its rise. Instead, the aim is to address a set of themes that emerged in the late-colonial period that I suggest are central to the politics of Hindutva in neoliberal Mumbai.

2.2 The historical formation of Hinduism

To understand how Hinduism has been appropriated and reconfigured by Hindutva as a political force to make claims on power, national identity and the future of the nation-state, it will be necessary to understand the historical formation of a Sanskritised unified Hinduism. This means accounting for the historical formation of Hinduism within the tensions between India and Empire. Prior to the seizure of Bengal by the East India Company and the incorporation of India into British empire a century later, far from a monolithic religious system, 'Hinduism' was more akin to 'a juxtaposition of flexible religious sects' (Zavos, 2000, p. 25). There is thus a long history of Hinduism as a way of life for the majority of people in India. Properly understood as a complex religio-cultural system, Hinduism, with its distinct concepts of *dharma* (duty, morality or 'way of life'); *karma* (the principle of cause and effect); *samsara* (reincarnation); and *moksha* (liberation) pervades key aspects of life for the vast majority of the population. Hinduism contains

distinct lineages. For example, followers of Krishna (*Vaishnavas*) are distinct from followers of Shiva (*Shaivites*) and a whole raft of festivals, holy sites, shrines, gods and pilgrimage routes are in circulation, shared and celebrated by some and relatively unimportant to others. The Hindu religion therefore contains a wide range of complex idiosyncratic expressions and practices across sects, communities and regions. In this regard, the term “Hinduism” has always been conditioned by highly contextualised meanings and uses (see for example, Anderson, 2013; Knott, 2016; Thapar, 2014; Vertovec, 2000, p.4).

‘Hindu’ in its form as a name depicting a set of religious practices appeared in Indian sources around the fourteenth century AD. Its origins rest in it being a geographical concept to denote the people living beyond the Sindhu (Indo-Aryan/Vedic Sanskrit name for the Indus river). By the fourteenth century, according to the Mughals, ‘Hindu’ came to describe all those living beyond the Indus that were not Muslims (Thapar, 2014, p. 10). When the British arrived in India they were ‘appalled and impressed’ by the mass of gods, religious sects and cults they found in equal measure. Their response, in collaboration with Western-educated Indian elites, was to bring the range of Hindu sects under one umbrella and impose ‘uniformity’ through the social engineering of ‘a newly minted “Hinduism” (Mishra, 2002).

The ‘successful’ colonisation of the Indian subcontinent by British imperial forces was reliant on the manufacture of social difference based in signifiers of race, religion and caste. With limited resources and “man power” drawn in from across the Empire, the ability of the British forces to gain a hold in India rested in the ability of the colonisers to promote disunity within the subcontinent. The patchwork of distinct societies that inhabited the vast land mass – characterised by *internal* ethnic, caste, linguistic, dynastic, social and confessional fragmentation – posed no serious resistance to British territorial ambitions and as a result, colonial policy set out to exacerbate and crystallise

these differences (Anderson, 2013, pp. 11-12). Drawing from ethnographic studies and the writings of colonial administrators, the colonisers officially reified ethnic, caste and religious identities (Dirks, 2001). In consequence, all those Indians who were not Muslim or Christian became “Hindu” by default. The historical formation of a unitary Hinduism is indebted to the crystallisation of these social categories. With this in mind, let us turn to a discussion of the intertwined projects of British imperialists and conservative Indian elites in the formation of Hinduism as a unitary religion.

Orientalist imperial visions

A popularised vision of how the British saw the state of India can be gleaned from James Mill’s imperial classic, *The History of British India* (1975 [1817]). Mill argued that India represented a ‘hideous state of society’. His vision of the subcontinent as static and unchanging led him to claim that ‘in beholding the Hindus of the present day, we are beholding the Hindus of many ages past; and are carried back, as were, into the deepest recesses of antiquity’ (Mill, 1975, pp. 246-248). A similar expression of imperial racial taxonomy – consistent with the variant of liberal ‘progress’ in vogue at the time – is found in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s acknowledgement that the British colonists in India ‘behaved like Spartans confronting Helots’. Macaulay admitted in no uncertain terms that ‘we are here dealing with a ‘race of sovereigns’, or ‘sovereign caste’, wielding absolute power over its ‘serfs’. This is not of course to say that he doubted the right of the British to rule over the ‘natives’ in the colonies (Losurdo, 2014, p. 250). It is, nonetheless, revealing to note that British imperial tropes were routinely laden with references to classical civilisations.

Indeed, ‘stories of Greece and Rome’ writes Duncan Bell (2016, p. 122) ‘provided a common frame of reference, a claim of authority, and a productive repertoire of images and arguments for a classically educated elite to interpret

contemporary culture and politics'. The ability to conquer India planted the idea of British Empire as a standard bearer for material, scientific and intellectual progress at the centre of Victorian intellectual life. Masters of their environment, the prevailing feeling among British imperialists was that the "Anglo-Saxon race" was ideally qualified to rule. This conception of Anglo-Saxon political community amongst British liberal political thinkers filtered into the notion of a "Greater Britain" that would unify Britain and its white settler colonies (Bell, 2011; 2016). This imagined community did not, however, extend to British India. The problematic of race that the system of Empire threw up, duly informed British conceptions of India's 'difference' (Metcalf, 1994, p. x). At the same time, visions of Anglo-Saxon 'Aryan' supremacy became more deeply rooted.

The discursive construction of British authority/superiority over the colonial world was not, of course, developed in a vacuum. It was pioneered on the ground by scholar-administrators of Empire, in close configuration with the practice of governance and consolidation of anthropology as an academic discipline. Typical in this sense is the anthropological reification of ethnic and caste identity and its impact on British colonial military policy. Following the Indian mutiny of 1857, a perceived sense of 'martial fitness' and 'inbred martial skill' was conferred upon – and thus seen to distinguish – select groups (on the assumption of their 'Aryan' descent) in north India and Nepal. These 'castes' were thought of in contrast to the 'effeminate' races of south India. 'Martial identities', then, became bound up with colonial governance and economy (Barkawi, 2017, p. 21; Metcalf, 1994; p. 125). Produced through physical interaction with Indian society and bolstered by popular academic disciplines; language, race and religion became the vital triad identifying the uniqueness of a 'civilisation' (Roychowdhury and Randhawa, 2015, p. 102).⁵³

⁵³ Roychowdhury and Randhawa (2015) note the history of religions and comparative linguistics, alongside developing disciplines of biological evolutionism and physical anthropology as of central importance.

This all amounted to Orientalist ideas of Aryan supremacy and effeminate races, becoming the primary framework for the interpretation of South Asian societies.⁵⁴ A timeless sense of division between Muslim, Hindu and other non-Hindu communities, and the notion of Brahmanical values as tantamount to an Indian ‘culture’, informed imperial visions of an ‘Asiatic’ society. Further still, these distilled British ideas of Indian society were coeval with the growth of ethnological race science in the wider colonial world (Bayly, 2008, p. 126). For the British, the ‘expressive core of culture-civilization’ was ‘Sanskrit, Aryan, Hinduism’ (Vanaik, 2017, p. 418). At a substantial level, then, British colonial rule served to valorise the idea of the subcontinent’s primordial and essentially ‘religious’ character. For our present purposes, what this means, is that colonial governance significantly contributed to the discursive amalgamation of diverse peoples into a singular ‘Hindu’ identity.

Primordial Indian visions

The Orientalist triptych of Sanskrit-Aryan-Hinduism was not, however, the work of the colonists alone. It was crystallised into a distinctly primordial conception of Hinduism – and by extension the idea of a nation of Hindus – by Indian elites. This section of the chapter fleshes out the proposition that ‘native’ Indian elites were not passive recipients of colonial knowledge. As moralists and social reformers, they actively engaged in Orientalist debates and advanced many of the key tenets underpinning these ideas. As we will see

⁵⁴ A brief note on the term Orientalism. The production of colonial knowledge has been subjected to close academic scrutiny. The most famous critic of the production of colonial knowledge in relation to the domination of colonised peoples has been Edward W. Said. Said’s primary argument in *Orientalism* (1978) can be usefully deployed to draw a line between the *discursive-literary* production of racialised, ‘inferior’ beings and their material exploitation within the historical system of colonialism by imperial powers. However, given the *materialist* approach of this thesis, in my view, the Saidian framework is unsuitable. Despite its evident power, the novelty of Said’s approach, as Fred Halliday (1993, p. 148) pointed out, was to negate an earlier body of scholarship anchored in the Marxist tradition and make a clean break with materialist analysis. The result is a kind of pervasive ‘Orientalist’ ambience that ascribes a virtually unlimited domination to the exercise of colonial power/knowledge (Sarkar, 2012, p. 241). By contrast, I draw more from the critique of Orientalist scholarship set forth by Abdel-Malik (1963) as well as Maxine Rodinson (2015). For a tight critique of Said’s work, deeply critical of his method albeit from a position of solidarity with his politics, see Aijaz Ahmad’s (1994) *In Theory: nations, classes, literatures*.

in chapter three, this knowledge came together in the political street. Primarily, these ideas were propagated through the engagement of Indian elites with the mushrooming nationalist organisations and societies of their social milieu. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, British colonial domination took on a relatively stable form across the subcontinent. At the same time, autonomous popular movements and intelligentsia based All-India nationalism emerged as powerful counterpoints to colonial domination (Sarkar, 1989, p. xvi). For much of the Indian intelligentsia, Hinduism became explicably intertwined with the emerging question of national identity. Through the paradigm of European Orientalist scholarship, the idea of religious community as the 'basic identity of Indian society' took root. Brahmanical textual sources formed the cornerstone (Thapar, 2014, p. p.78).

In the mission to define the Indian nation in juxtaposition to British colonial rule, three themes of colonial scholarship struck a chord with nationalist thinkers. First, nationalists on all sides appear to have taken the Orientalist idea of Hinduism and Islam as monolithic and separate religions as given. In the main, Hinduism and Islam were taken as entirely separate uniform systems of belief, as opposed to flexible open-ended experiences that developed in a historical context of cultural exchange and social intercourse.⁵⁵ As we will see, in the hands of an influential stream of nationalist thinkers, 'the nineteenth-century perception of religion in India moved from its earlier relative fluidity at the popular level into a defined pattern with indelible boundaries' (Thapar, 2014, p. 124). The idea of Hindu and Muslim communities as separate cultures with little to no cultural commonality was broadly codified into different strains of nationalist thought on the subcontinent. Thus, Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim League characterised Indian Muslims as 'a nation', while the Congress blended aspects of secular and Hindu nationalism, even while claiming to stand for secular nationalism

⁵⁵ See for instance Green (2011).

unequivocally against the communalism of the Muslim League (Vanaik, 2017, pp. 998-999).

Second, in the context of European ‘race science’, ideas of Aryanism powerfully informed Hindu revivalist currents. Among the scholarly currents that contributed to these ideas, nationalist interpretations of ‘Aryan race theory’ began to appear in the journals of newly minted anthropological societies as early as 1863. Take for instance, Gannender Mohun Tagore, a professor of Hindu law and Bengali language at University College London (1861-5), who wrote in *The Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* of the contrast between the ‘wild independence’ of Indian aboriginal tribes and the ‘superior genius’ of the ‘Aryan race’.⁵⁶ Beyond the anecdotal, various historians of colonial India have noted that many colonial-era anthropologists, concerned with a racial-ethnographic reading of caste, identified a hierarchical caste-based social landscape where some groups were more historically “evolved” than others.⁵⁷ “Brahminised” Indians, Susan Bayly (2008, pp. 128-129) explains,

‘were identified by ethnologists as those who possessed superior Aryan blood, meaning that they were supposedly descended from the same racial ‘stock’ as the white European, whose key ethnological endowment was the capacity to achieve ‘nationhood’.

These ideas came to animate key nationalist intellectuals and politicians, including proponents of Hindutva ideas.⁵⁸ The idea of a deep lineage of Vedic

⁵⁶ Quoted in Bayly (2008, p. 126).

⁵⁷ It is worth noting the remarkable similarity in the logic of this argument to that communicated by the likes of James Mill and his contemporaries, as discussed above.

⁵⁸ Key nationalist thinkers, from Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) to the Bombay judge and social reformer Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901), founder of the Arya Samaj Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) and revolutionary nationalist Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) modified the term ‘Aryan’ in conjunction with their ideas of religious revivalism, social reform and nationalist thought (Bhatt, 2001, p. 14). An important source of ‘practices of self-identification’ in this mode can be traced to the increasing importance of ‘representation by religious community’, as critical to livelihoods and access

Aryan civilisation, then, became a largely unquestioned fact for large swathes of the Indian intelligentsia and a 'linear paradigm' for the form of an emergent national identity for India (Bhatt, 2001, p. 14). The consequence of this conjuncture was that ideas of race, religion and caste became integral to the question of Indian independence, the proposed character of the future nation and ideas of the place and role of Hinduism in world history. Fundamentally racist ideas of Aryan supremacy were thus in popular circulation throughout British empire and beyond. It was only later that these themes would go on to animate the racialised ideology of Nazi Germany (Ilaiah, 2016). While strict connotations of 'race' and the logics of white supremacy underpinning Aryanism were abandoned, the 'xenological' connotations of the term remained (Bhatt, 2001, p. 15). The important point to take away here – as will be discussed below – is that these themes inspired the development of a distinct ideology of Hindu nationalism under the aegis of 'Hinduness' – or Hindutva – and propagation of the 'Hindu way of life'.

Finally, passionate debates over the role of caste in Hinduism and its place in the future nation, gripped Indian political thought in broad sense (see Bayly, 2008). Critically, a significant stratum of Indian elites concerned with the making of the Hindu nation avowed the Aryan 'race genius' of the Hindus *in defence of caste*. A key example is that of the influential Hindu missionary and social reformer, Swami Vivekananda.⁵⁹ A pivotal figure in the historical formation of Hindu nationalism, it is true that Vivekananda made disparaging

to economic resources under British colonial rule (Thapar, 1989, p.229). The aftermath of the 1857 rebellion caused particular unease amongst the British and gave birth to a new desire on behalf of the coloniser to 'understand the native mind', to the extent that the very future of British rule in India was seen to be at stake. In this context, how to deal with and control the vast diversity of Indian peoples became a question of central concern (Gopal, 2019, p. 44). To be sure, this process was undergirded by the concerns of the British colonial state after 1857, especially regarding the classification and calculation of the subcontinent's peoples 'each possessing its own "essences" and qualities' (Bayly, 2008, p. 98). Post-1857, company rule was reconstituted under the auspices of the British crown, resulting in what Nicholas Dirks (2001) has called the 'Ethnographic State'.

⁵⁹ Born into an English educated bourgeois family in Calcutta in 1863, Narendranath Datta gained the monastic name 'Vivekananda' as a follower of the influential saint Ramakrishna (1836-1886). Datta rose to prominence to earn his title following his popular speeches on Hinduism and yoga at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893. His proficiency in both Bengali and English greatly aided his reception in the West.

comments on caste, but it is also noteworthy that on balance, he vigorously supported caste as an Indian social institution of central importance. For Vivekananda, it was

‘in the nature of society to form itself into groups... Caste is a natural order; I can perform one duty in social life, and you another; you can govern a country, and I can mend an old pair of shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes?... Caste is good. That is the only natural way of solving life’.⁶⁰

Vivekananda was not alone in this view of an ancient ‘moral community’ of Hindus. Many of those involved in nation building believed that Hindus took caste to be a ‘divinely mandated institution’ and engaged its practice as a ‘central fact of [their] social and spiritual life’.⁶¹ Along with the endorsement of the Varna system many nineteenth century nationalist thinkers appear to have imbibed the proposition of Brahmins as ‘intellectually, morally, culturally or ‘ethno-logically’ superior to the shudras, and the Aryan *dvija* (‘twice-born’ castes of brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas) as superior to the non-Aryans (Anaryans)’ (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 15). Accordingly, a racialised notion of caste, replete with notions of discipline and hierarchy was positioned by nation builders such as Vivekananda as the social glue of Hindu moral community: on the social foundations of caste, the glorious ‘Hindu nation’ was to be built. In this register, ‘Hindus’ were to be understood as a race of people bound together by a shared but hierarchical conception of primordial belonging. What Vivekananda’s thought represents, is the amalgamation of Hindu piety and caste with the aims and political objectives of building a modern nation.

⁶⁰ See *Vivekananda Collected works III*: pp. 245-246. Cited in Bayly (2008, p.165).

⁶¹ As we will see in chapter four, this acceptance of the caste system as the divinely mandated social glue of Indian society runs through the thought of Indian elites from M.K Gandhi to Narendra Modi.

Taken together, Orientalist/primordial visions resonate in the present. As we have seen, in times of late-colonial interaction, scores of upper caste Hindus collaborated with the British to shape what Pankaj Mishra (2009) labels a ‘Sanskritized “unified Hinduism” under Brahmin hegemony.’ And indeed,

‘this British-Brahmin version of Hinduism – one of the many invented traditions born around the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – has continued to find many takers among semi-Westernised Hindus suffering from an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the apparently more successful organised religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The Hindu nationalists today, who long for India to become a muscular power, stand in a direct line of nineteenth century Indian reform movements devoted to purifying and reviving a Hinduism perceived as having grown too fragmented and weak.’

For Hindu nationalists, from late-colonial times to the present, the Hindu people are the rightful and original inhabitants of the subcontinent. The subcontinent marks the territorial home of a once great Hindu civilisation, subjugated and conquered first by Muslim invaders and later by the British. This view is the cornerstone of Hindutva ideology elaborated in the political thought of thinkers from V. D Savarkar,⁶² to second RSS Chief M.S Golwalkar, BJP leader L.K Advani and indeed Narendra Modi and current RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat (see Jaffrelot, 2007). As we will see, Mishra’s claims are important because they shed light on the ‘British-Brahmin’ formation of Hinduism and its legacy in the present as a political force geared to make

⁶² The intellectual totem of Hindutva, Savarkar was highly influential in his time in large part thanks to his coinage of the term ‘Hindutva’ and the wide dissemination of his writings on the subject. Savarkar’s most famous text is *Essentials of Hindutva* [1923] renamed and reprinted in 1928 as *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Animated by overlapping preoccupations with militarism, Hindu ‘emasculatation’ and ideas of racial and caste hierarchy, Savarkar’s writings have acquired the status of “classics” of the Hindutva world view.

claims on power, state and society by the Sangh. Having sketched an account of how the historical formation of a singular, unitary Hinduism was shaped by colonial forces and primordial Indian voices, the task remains to map Hindutva as a school of thought that envisions India in Hindu terms as a matter of political priority.

2.3 Mapping Hindutva.

The historical legacy of the formation of Hinduism into a unitary ‘religion’ is characterised by a distinct chain of reasoning (Vanaik, 2017). I argue in this section of the chapter that Hindutva draws upon this chain of reasoning for political-strategic ends. The conundrum of understanding the relationships between Hinduism and Hindutva has led a number of scholars to claim the need to distinguish between Hinduism – broadly conceived – and Hindutva, while at the same time recognising the interconnections between the two.

For instance, writing in the 1990s, in response to the political gains of the Hindutva movement, cultural theorist and psychologist Ashis Nandy (1988) argued that there is good reason to conceive of the Hindu religion as split into two: a distinction is made between ‘religion and faith’ and ‘religion as ideology’. By religious faith, Nandy (1988, p.322) means religion as way of life (*dharma*). Religious ideology, on the other hand, refers to the symbolism of religion as a means to contest political or socioeconomic interests. The crux of Nandy’s argument is that complex, contradictory and discordant expressions of religious Hinduism, must be separated out from the mobilisation of religious cosmology, symbolism and cultural markers, that are to be understood as the political tools of Hindutva. Nandy’s dichotomy has also been taken up and reconfigured by sociologist Sudipta Kaviraj, where a distinction between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ religion, is made between the religiosity of piety, faith and metaphysical belief in the sublime and what he terms ‘political religion’. Mobilising this conceptual apparatus allows Kaviraj to point out that it is political religion that is mobilised for electoral politics, where ‘the

thinness of the definition' is ideally suited for political mobilisation (Kaviraj, 2010, p. 352).

Hindutva is therefore concerned with the nation-state, mass politics and power. Both Nandy and Kaviraj speak of Hindutva in terms of a malleable form of political subjectivity, that is less concerned with the sublime than it is the realm of politics and power. These positions are not dissimilar to the nineteenth century attempt at production of a more singular, unified Hinduism discussed above. As Romila Thapar (2016, p. 52) points out, 'Hindutva has the characteristics of a sect that reformulates selected beliefs to create, in this case, a socio-political organization with an attempt at ideological coherence.' While it is impossible to ignore the diversity of Hinduism – an open-ended experience of popular devotion and religious expression – it is therefore important to note that Hindutva's monolithic construction of Hinduism (in a bid for political power) takes its cue from earlier moves to reform and produce a more essentialist unitary Hinduism (Vanaik, 2017, p. 455).

Antonio Gramsci's (1971, p.132)⁶³ attempt to grapple with 'the question of religion or world-view' helps make sense of this process. Gramsci was well aware of the role of religious ethics as 'sources of legitimisation of the status quo, but also as a medium for political struggles that aim for the transformation of society' (Grelle, 2017, p. 2). Accordingly, the benefit of Gramsci's thoughts on religion is that he refers us to 'the problem of religion taken not in the confessional sense but in the secular sense of a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 326). Rearranged in the present in often curious amalgamation with seemingly contradictory forms, folklore and popular cultural forms bear the traces – or 'residues' – of previously dominant cultural

⁶³ The relation between common sense and religion elaborated here builds upon the discussion in Crehan (2002, pp. 110-111).

paradigms. This means that relatively coherent sets of religious and ethical ideas take root, are taken for granted, and easily mobilised for political ends.

This can be seen in the concept of the ‘national-popular’. A critical question for Gramsci was ‘when [...] the conditions for awakening and developing a national-popular collective will [can] be said to exist? (Gramsci, 1971, p. 130).⁶⁴ According to Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, the concept of the national-popular should be taken to describe ‘some form of “historical bloc” ‘between national and popular aspirations in the formation of which intellectuals – in the wide Gramscian use of the term – play an essential mediating role’. To put it another way, the national-popular is a sociocultural concept that relates to the position of the masses within the culture of ‘the nation’ (Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 421). In the case of Hindutva, this means formation of a political vehicle for the transformation of Indian society that operates through the weaponisation of the “common sense” of unitary Hinduism (see Gramsci, 1971, pp. 323-26; 419-25).

On the social contours of common sense, Gramsci (1971, p. 326) is worth quoting here in full:

‘every social stratum has its own ‘common sense’ and its own ‘good sense’, which are basically the most widespread conceptions of life and of man. Every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of ‘common sense’: this is the document of its historical effectiveness.

⁶⁴ When considering the meaning of this term it needs to be remembered that Gramsci was a communist militant, that while concerned with the theory and analysis of the ‘national-popular’, was motivated above all by communist praxis: the task of *forming* a national-popular consciousness in the aid of proletarian revolution. Notably, the notion of the national-popular connects with the concept of ‘war of position’. This category is explained in relation to that fact that ‘a social group can, and indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principles for the winning of such power)’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57). War of position, in the sense in which it will be deployed in this thesis, relates to the struggle – at once intellectual, cultural and political – of social forces to gain decisive influence over society.

Common sense is not something ridged and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life. ‘Common sense’ is the folklore of philosophy, and is always half-way between folklore properly speaking and the philosophy, science and economics of the specialists. Common sense creates the folklore of the future, that is as a relatively ridged phase of popular knowledge at a given time and place’.

The common sense of Hinduism, its symbolism and iconography, then, is duly mobilised by dominant nationalist forces into what Achin Vanaik (2017, p. 472) has understood as a common *chain of reasoning*. The chain is articulated as follows:

‘ethos/spirit is the heart of Hinduism, which is at the heart of, or coterminous with, Hindu culture (which defines Indian culture), which is at the heart of the Hindu nation (which defines the Indian nation).’

India’s nationalist figures may not endorse the *full* chain of reasoning, but the vast majority and its popular expression most certainly subscribes – past and present – either implicitly or explicitly, to *some* of the links in the chain (Vanaik, 2017, p. 472). For instance, for the Congress it is true enough that a definition of ‘Indianness’ is at the official core of the nationalist project. However, for those of the Hindu right, the future of ‘the nation’ boils down to the question “who is a Hindu?” and therefore, a definition of ‘Hinduness’, or rather, ‘Hindutva’ over ‘Indianness’ (Vanaik, 2017, p. 472). The Hindu chain of reasoning, then, is a pivotal element of Indian nationalist common sense.

This being said, Hindutva ideology is represented above all by the politics of the RSS. Founded in 1925 by Keshav B. Hegewar (1889-1940) (drawing on the politics and writings of V.D Savarkar) the RSS was a direct reaction to the non-violent anti-colonial strategy of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948). With their open and transparent aim to organise (and politicise) Hindu society, early RSS men were concerned about the politics of non-cooperation in the 1920s, citing Gandhi's method as a primary example of 'non-discipline' (Chaturvedi, 2010). Two further events are of particular importance. First, the peaking of the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra and the interpretation of the 'rise of the depressed castes' as disruptive of Hindu unity. And second, the perception of Muslim organisational strength and the spectre of 'murderous designs' against the 'Hindu nation' (Bhatt, 2001, p. 117).

The RSS organised in response to these perceived threats to unite the disparate population of the subcontinent as a forerunner to independence from colonial rule and to counter "weakness" by organising Hindus against Islam and Christianity.⁶⁵ To protect against the dissemination of Buddhist and Jain principles of "extreme non-violence" (a condition that had allegedly been facilitated through Hindu subordination by Christians, and crucially "Islam"), Hindutva ideologues claim that the Hindu 'race' must rediscover a "war-strategy" to guard against invasion and the very real threat of Hindu annihilation (Chaturvedi, 2010, p. 433). These 'foreign enemies' are above all, considered a threat to Hindu claims to the subcontinent.

In short, 'organised Hindutva' emerged right from the beginning as an upper caste reaction to efforts at self-assertion by downtrodden groups within the Hindu fold and a reaction to the 'Muslim enemy' (Basu et al, 1993). If the idea of the Muslim 'Other' forms a critical aspect of the ideological core of Hindutva, then the caste system forms the social glue of Hindu society. This is particularly evident if we consider the Mandal Commission report. In the wake

⁶⁵ For the RSS, 'Hinduism' includes Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains.

of the report, the RSS was forced to deal with questions of inequality in Indian society. Pivoting away from what it considered to be a leftist discourse based around the problem of *samata* (equality) the Sangh sought to distinguish its own thoughts on the matter by launching the Samajik Samrasta Manch in April 1983 at Pune.⁶⁶

The RSS samrasta vision of harmony between castes was born of this movement and approaches something like an RSS endorsed ideal of equality (Narayanan, 2020). It is perhaps best summarised in former RSS chief M.S ‘Guruji’ Golwalkar’s slogan “Sab jaati mahaan, sab jaati samaan” (all castes are great and all castes are equal) (see Teltumbde, 2018, p. 334). Though the official position of the RSS has changed over time, according to present organisational discourse under the leadership of Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS neither supports nor rejects caste. In reality, however, RSS efforts towards samrasta serve to defend the status quo of caste hierarchy under the umbrella of Hindutva. Derived from earlier discourses of caste as central to the formation of a singular, unitary Hinduism, Hindutva forces place the RSS samrasta vision at the centre of an organised effort to forge a consolidated Hindu unity. Here ‘social harmony’ between castes, as opposed to the critique and annihilation of caste, is seen as the antidote to the problem of equality and means to preserve the integrity of Hindu society (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 333; 354).

Unlike Hinduism, Hindutva, then, is irrevocably concerned with the question of (nationalist) mass politics (Palshikar, 2019). Drawing *from* the crucible of a singular, unitary Hinduism, Hindutva develops and reconstitutes three interconnected core themes as pillars of a powerful, all-encompassing imagined political community of Hindus, outlined as follows:

⁶⁶ The common Hindi word for equality is *samata*.

- (i) The **disciplined Hindu body** is the primary social unit of the nation. In contrast to late-colonial conceptions of Hindus as weak and effeminate, ideals of virility; physical strength and fitness; cleanliness and social hygiene are cultivated and glorified as a means to restore Hindu pride and build the Hindu rashtra.
- (ii) The Hindu rashtra is to be constituted as a disciplined **moral community of Hindus** drawing on the RSS *samrasta* vision that ‘all castes are great [and] all castes are equal’. The caste system is rendered as the divinely mandated social glue of the Hindu nation.
- (iii) Drawing from late-colonial ideas of the superiority of the Indo-Aryan race, Hindutva seeks restoration of a (fictional) golden Vedic age and dissemination of Hindu spirituality as India’s gift to the world. Following establishment of the Hindu rastra and *völkish* constellation of ‘one people, one nation, one leader’ (under the supreme leadership of Narendra Modi) the **‘world-historical’ mission of Hinduism** will be realised.

The political strategy of the BJP – and, I argue, by extension Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga – is articulated around these thematics. Here we see the basic premise of RSS ideology; a strong and virile mass Hindu culture must be built before it will be possible for the nation to find its feet and face its enemies (see Ahmad, 2015). Hinduism is seen as the constitutive element of Indian culture and all other ‘non-native’ religions are alien. For the RSS, Indian culture is ‘so deeply defined by its Hindutva essence, that no non-Hindu can be fully admitted’ (Ahmad, 2020, p. 22). Binding ideas of

discipline, Hindu moral community and the idea of Hinduism as a world-dynamic force together with Hindutva ideology, is the primordial myth of Aryan-Hindu civilisation. Hindutva not only bares the traces of Orientalist scholarship and primordialist Indian thought, but directly reproduces it. Having discussed the relations between Hinduism and having defined Hindutva as it will be deployed in the thesis, the final section of the chapter (2.5) moves to discuss the role of the Congress and collapse of Nehruvian socialism in the emergence of Hindutva as the *defacto* culture of the nation. First, let us turn to a discussion of the Indian experience of neoliberal development, as the backdrop to the resurgence of Hindutva politics after 1980 – and thus Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga – with special reference to central Mumbai.

2.4 Indian neoliberalism and its discontents

This section of the chapter shifts gear to offer a working definition of neoliberalism and discusses its unfolding in the Indian context, before continuing to sketch out the effects of neoliberal restructuring for the transformation of social worlds in central Mumbai. The section sets the scene for discussions of ‘new’ theatrical strategies of Hindutva politics that have risen out of the tensions between Indian society and the globalisation of neoliberalism that forms the back drop to chapters four and five.

The capitalist mode of production develops in different contexts and periods in time and space. Indeed, the power of capital extends to the social relations of everyday life, yet, cooperation, friendship, intimate relations, culture, and so on are practices that are not strictly commodified and subsumed by capitalist expansion. Social change is not therefore connected in a crude and simplistic way to economic transformations. Instead, human agency is radically contingent and particular historical conditions give rise to multiple political possibilities. This is not, of course, to say that capital exists over and

above society. In this context, the term ‘neoliberalism’ is at once inseparable from the process of the global restructuring of capitalist accumulation and concomitant reshuffling of class relations after 1973, and by extension, from the minutiae of everyday social relations (Harvey, 1996; 2005; Swyngedouw, 1997; Smith 2004). As David Harvey (2005, p. 2) explains,

‘neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.’

Neoliberalism thus represents a class project articulated in and through the actions and demands of a ruling class. This is not to say that neoliberalism is totalising and complete. But rather, that it is an uneven and gradual project that comes up against various forms of resistance and is therefore modular rather than uniform (Desai, 2012, p. 29). In the last instance, neoliberalism represents a political project towards ‘the restoration of class power’ and accumulation of wealth in the hands of the dominant classes in the form of corporate profits and financialised capital (Harvey, 2005, p, 16).

Contemporary neoliberal India registers jaw-dropping inequality, as an expanding elite become ever more distant from the mass of the population. Given the remarkable failure of the state to deliver essential basic services against the backdrop of a rising billionaire class, income and livelihood across Indian society is radically uneven.⁶⁷

With respect to the question of capitalist accumulation, urban policy and the regulation of social life in contemporary cities, neoliberalism takes shape in

⁶⁷ See for example Crabtree (2019) and Teltumbde (2018).

local conditions through capitalist led pro-growth urban development policies. Everyday political struggles and the heterogeneity of the social take place against this backdrop, of rapidly shifting urbanisation and uneven spatial development (Brenner and Schmidt, 2015; Harvey, 2006; Smith, 2004). In this context, the urban has been transformed in the wake of ‘worldwide social, economic, regulatory and environmental transformations of the post-1980s period’ (Brenner and Schmidt, 2015, p. 153). The complex geography of cities connects through regulatory practices of neoliberal urbanism across localities, as processes of neoliberalisation ‘collide with other (extra-neoliberal) social processes as well as with inherited patterns of development’ – neoliberal development mutates in response to different local conditions (Parnell and Robinson, 2012, p.599). In the Indian context, class power interfaces with the dominance of upper caste Hindus (see Roy, 2014a; Teltumbde, 2018; Yengde, 2019).⁶⁸

Such analysis of the multi-layered connected geography of neoliberal urban development finds its most trenchant critics among postcolonial urbanists (see Derickson, 2014; Robinson, 2015; Roy, 2015) and centres on a treatment of ‘difference’ and critique of Eurocentrism. As Kanishka Goonewardena (2018, p. 5) notes, ‘this kind of postcolonial perspective not only emphasizes differences between cities, but also argues that Northern theory is incapable of addressing the specificities of the Southern urban condition’.⁶⁹ Off the back of this position, a methodological injunction to chart the distinctive aspects of particular urban locales of the ‘global south’ – against universalist accounts of neoliberal urbanism – takes the form of thick descriptions of everyday life and subaltern politics ‘as theoretically self-evident counterpoints to the apparent

⁶⁸ Though caste hierarchy is complex as well as contradictory, the inherited privileges of caste society – and in particular those falling to the Brahmin caste – translate into an entirely disproportionate near-domination of Indian public life. Take for example the powerful matrix of dominance in media positions, cabinet composition and the corporate sector (see Yengde, 2019, pp. 344-354).

⁶⁹ By ‘Northern theory’ the postcolonial urbanists refer to liberalism and Marxism, though more often than not, the term appears to be a metonym for Marxism.

totalizations of Euro-American frameworks' (Brenner and Schmid, 2015, p. 161).

Postcolonial urbanism takes its cue on these matters from wider debates and parallel arguments against class analysis that have taken place within subaltern historical studies and postcolonial cultural theory (Brenner and Schmid, 2015, p. 161).⁷⁰ In the name of "provincializing Europe" (see Chakrabarty, 2000) postcolonial scholars of the urban look to excavate 'embodied and everyday moments' in the cities of the South (Derickson, 2014, p. 2). The overall aim, according to leading postcolonial urbanist Ananya Roy (2015), is to displace what is seen to be the 'universal grammar of cityness, modified by (exotic) empirical variation' derived from Marxist theory. Postcolonial urbanism is instead animated by the task of 'undertaking a political economy attentive to historical difference as a fundamental and constitutive force in the making of global urbanisation' (Roy, 2015, p. 8).

⁷⁰ The decline of class analysis has been part of a wider global pattern, with postmodern and postcolonial approaches to the study of society assuming the mantle of radical theory (see Chibber, 2006, pp. 357-358). The results have been particularly acute with regards to the academic study of South Asian politics and society. To be sure, the debates around the role of 'theory' in the study of south Asian society are complex (see Chibber, 2013). However, when it comes to south Asian studies and the analysis of Indian society in particular, the approach advocated by the Subaltern Studies group of historians has been extraordinarily influential. There is no need to delve into a detailed and exhaustive explication of the positions of Subalternist scholars here. However, it is worth noting that that master themes of the Subaltern school – the idea of an 'autonomous domain' of subaltern politics, and the problematic of a self-contained 'subaltern culture' – correctly highlight the importance of culture but fail to account for the pervasive character of the caste system as the lifeworld of Indian society. In brief, Ranajit Guha, the founder of the Subaltern Studies project, declared in his founding statement that the subaltern approach was a revolt against 'Cambridge School' themes. The revisionist aim of the Subalternist was to unearth 'the politics of the people.' The so-called Cambridge School of historiography, on the contrary, approached the study of Indian society and Indian nationalism, through a lens of "high politics", the role of elites, and a focus on colonial-era institutions and their proximate effects on the national movement (see Low, 1977). Over time, the Subaltern school shifted, from a focus on Gramscian themes of the subaltern and hegemony, towards works inspired by Michel Foucault's studies on the relations of power-knowledge (Ludden, 2002, p. 7). It is this latter stream that has come to define the theoretical orientation of the school and most contemporary approaches that endorse 'postcolonial' analysis. Symbolically at least, the move away from the Subalternists original Gramscian orientation was cemented by the endorsements of celebrated literary theorists Edward W. Said and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, in the edited volume *Selected Subaltern Studies* (1988). The influence of these endorsements should not be over exaggerated, as Chibber (2006, p. 374) suggests. However, the volume certainly played an important role in the legitimisation and popularisation of the project within the U.S and European academy.

As expressed by [Parnell and Robinson \(2012, p. 597\)](#) postcolonial analysis of the urban means taking the ‘autonomous logics of state formation and intervention’ as the starting point of analysis and as separate to the broader dynamics of capital accumulation. For [Ghertner \(2014\)](#) the implications of this injunction are that India’s ‘urban revolution’ cannot be explained with simple reference to the Euro-American template of ‘Northern theory.’ If the multiple experiences of metropolitan modernity outside of the Euro-American experience are to be better analysed and understood, for the postcolonial urbanists, ‘Northern theory’ must be eschewed ([see Goonewardena, 2018](#)). To theorise the urban processes afflicting cities of the global South, extra-capitalist power, the role of traditional elites and the developmental/activist state must be foregrounded ([Parnell and Robinson, 2012, p. 597](#)).

Yet, to capture the global urban condition means accounting for the nature of a capitalist world system that pivots around an incessant drive towards capital accumulation. Following [Brenner and Schmid \(2015, p. 161\)](#), I want to argue that this requires an understanding of (neoliberal) capitalism not ‘as merely a background for urban development, but [as representing] a constitutive formation – a self-forming, internally contradictory evolving whole’ in which difference, locality and place are ‘inscribed and mediated.’ As Indian neoliberalism was officially launched with the implementation of the New Economic Plan (NEP) in 1991, the demands of Indian capital – both domestic and foreign-diasporic – were largely met.⁷¹ The stage was thus set for the

⁷¹ Following the official shift to neoliberalism in the form of the New Economic Plan (NEP) India’s political economy was shocked into wide-ranging transformation, as central governments grip on the private sector – the so-called “licence-permit raj” – was ‘virtually eliminated’. On the licence permit Raj, see [Chibber \(2003\)](#) and [Kolhi \(2006a; 2006b; 2010\)](#). In the process, New Delhi lost the ability to influence, direct and distribute investment geographically across the union. In consequence, after 1991, Indian states began to compete with one another to attract domestic and foreign private investment ([Murali, 2017, pp. 250-1](#)). As Kanta Murali has argued, following the introduction of the NEP, the relative success of states in harnessing investment has depended on the policy responses of states and the class configuration of the ruling electoral coalitions within states. In the case of Maharashtra, the pro-business agenda of the BJP-Shiv Sena coalition (after 1995) dominated over redistributive concerns. Successive administrations have continued on the same path and as a result, the benefits of post-liberalisation growth in Mumbai have been far from inclusive. Pervasive inequality and social marginalisation have continued to expand at a rapid pace.

introduction of speculative practices and investment of domestic and foreign capital to exploit cheap labour and natural resources (Das, 2015, p. 716).

This is not to say that neoliberal capitalist urbanisation entails increasing homogenisation, or for that matter, as Neil Lazarus (2016, p. 98) points out, ‘the progressive universalisation of Western norms, values and modes of social life’. Indeed, in so far as the historical geography of capitalism is marked by highly differentiated uneven development, capitalism is anything but a purely homogenising dynamic (Chibber, 2013, p. 245).⁷² In the context of the city, the political street serves as the primary arena of sociopolitical contention, of ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’ – where the member of religious, ethnic, racial and caste grouping mix and mingle – but also the shared public space where collective sentiments of nation and community crystallise (Bayat, 2010, p. 13). These myriad social processes nonetheless take form in the context of neoliberal urbanity. To better understand the political contradictions thrown up by the complex rearticulation of socio-economic space wrought by neoliberalism in India, let us turn to a discussion of capitalist restructuring and the transformation of social worlds in Mumbai.

From mills to malls (or Bombay to Mumbai)

The Indian experience of neoliberal development testifies to how the economic restructuring of capitalist states after 1973 took place resolutely, albeit unevenly, across the global economy. After 1980, the process of urban development in Bombay came to reflect an alliance between commercial and financial interests and state power. Together, these interests successfully combined to subvert the planning process and re-shape the city in the interests of capital (Blom Hansen, 2001; Bannerjee-Guha, 2009). At the same time, trends of rural-to-urban migration kick started by the institutionalisation of Import-Substitution Industrialisation (ISI), and

accelerated urban development towards a highly unstable pattern of ‘hyper-urbanisation and slumification’ (Davis, 2006). This intensification of contradictions in the urban environment spawned a social context of marginalisation, poverty and dispossession that, in turn, generated the formation of new demands on the state and new claims on the city (Sassen, 1996). The critical event in the restructuring of Bombay’s political economy and production of new spaces of urban experience came in the form of the ‘Great Textile Strike’ of 1982-1983.

To be sure, the Bombay textile industry had been undergoing major bouts of restructuring since the 1960s. Before serious modernisation drives kicked into gear, a differentiation of units in the city had already taken place as part of the industry underwent automation (Patel, 2004, pp. 334-335). This delivered a significant retrenchment of labour and formal employment in the industry declined by half. As Sujata Patel (2004, pp. 334-335) explains, ‘even though workload and productivity increased, wages did not rise’. At the same time, wages of ‘those in capital-intensive industries remained relatively high.’ The restructuring of the industry accelerated as a consequence of the Great Strike.

Labour unrest started to brew as workers became more aware of the lag between wages, bonus payments and conditions in other industries, against the relatively meagre package offered in the mills. As a result, textile workers began to organise under the leadership of the charismatic and militant union leader Datta Samant (Bakshi, 1986, p. 9).⁷³ In the event, almost two-hundred thousand workers and approximately sixty-five percent of the mills participated in the strike action. In total, the strike lasted a full eighteen months, becoming one of the longest strikes in Indian labour history.

Despite the long history of industrial action in Bombay, the 1982 strike was the most decisive for the future of the industry and the social worlds of labour

⁷³ On the details and dilemmas of Samants leadership, see Pendse (1981).

that powered it. The strike and its fall out marked a pivotal moment in the modern history of the city in terms of the patterns of productive activity and opportunities for livelihood. But more importantly, in terms of massive retrenchment and social marginalisation for large swathes of the cities working class population. As [Ravi Gadge \(2016, p. 161\)](#) has pointed out, ‘it is estimated that prior to the strike there were about 232,000 workers employed in the industry. The failure of the strike led to a massive retrenchment of workers. Almost 106,000 workers lost their jobs’. The outcome of the strike therefore represents perhaps the biggest job loss in the history of modern industry in India. In the end, the war of attrition launched by the workers and spearheaded by Datta Samant collapsed to pave the way for a decisive victory for industrial capital.

A crucial reason for focus on the mill industry is that its decline has radically reshaped the streets and public spaces of central Mumbai. The newly redundant textile workers did not have much chance of finding formal employment, instead turning to informal processes as a means of livelihood ([Patel, 2004, p. 335](#)).⁷⁴ The decline of factory labour and rise of mass informality in place of the old industrial centre, then, represented a dramatic transformation and profound restructuring of the social worlds of Bombay labour. In the wake of the 1982-83 strike, the development of the Indian economy and its ‘transition to high-growth’ has taken place through mass unemployment and a dramatic shift to ‘low income security informal work’ ([Barnes, 2015, p. 36](#)). As of 2019, eighty-five percent of India’s non-agricultural workforce is ‘informal’ and thus without any form of social insurance ([ILO, 2019, p. 1](#)). In Mumbai, the consequences of the strike bear this out. Most notably, in the transition from a productive economy to a speculative one. The closure of the once sprawling mill complexes has revealed

⁷⁴ However, rather than a process of de-industrialisation as has been typical in many former manufacturing hubs located in the ‘Global North’. In Bombay, in the main, manufacturing activities merely shifted to the fringes of the city, albeit in the form of a shift to production driven by informal enterprises and the employment of informal labour practices ([Barnes, 2015, p. 75](#)).

acres of prime land for real estate development, as tens of thousands of relatively secure jobs have been lost (Appadurai, 1996; D'Monte, 2005; Ghadge, 2016).

At a more conceptual level, we see that alongside the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation, comes a disorientation and radical shift in the qualities of social and cultural life. Systems of production and the advancing commodification of everyday life connect with a yearning to embed an increasingly individualistic society within a set of familiar common values (Harvey, 1990, p. 288). According to Lefebvre (2004, 2014) while living human beings reproduce themselves through 'natural' cyclical rhythms, they are also profoundly affected by linear socio-economic time. As a result, meaning and interpretation of the city and its spaces are shaped by experiences of space, time and praxis. In this regard, we can assert that the transition from mills to malls – or Bombay to Mumbai – has driven a transformation of social lives and restructuring of 'worlds of labour' (see Chakrabarti et al, 2016, p. 105; Joshi, 2003). By the mid-1980s, the mill lands had become deeply embattled spaces. Major redevelopment began following the earmarking of the area as prime real estate in the city's 1990 development plan. And in the years since, the beating heart of industrial Bombay has progressively become the 'modern' space of central Mumbai, replete with luxury apartments, office space and commercial ventures.

Take for instance the case of the old Phoenix Mills at Lower Parel (see figure 3). In 1996, the once sprawling industrial complex was literally transformed into a mall. As one crosses the Sanapati Bapat Marg flyover and passes the rows of dilapidated chawls, 'High Street Phoenix' is notable and gleaming on the right-hand side. Entry is gained by passing through security armed with metal detectors and an airport-style bag X-ray. The density of bodies is radically thinner compared to the surrounding streets. The hustle of those streets is replaced by throngs of youngsters in designer clothes clutching

smartphones. Those inside the compound are affluent, well dressed and can be heard chatting in English. In the Starbucks coffee shop young men can be heard discussing time well spent in the United States and the benefits (and pitfalls) of translating knowledge acquired from studying an MBA into start-up business ventures.⁷⁵ To be sure, this air-conditioned enclave is surrounded in part by the high-density informal economy typical of Mumbai streets and nestled within the former mill areas. Nonetheless, arrival by taxi or car provides escape from the realities of the claustrophobic city, in the form of consumption of global brands and access to the modern cinema that sits on top of the retail outlets. High Street Phoenix is a symbolic marker *par excellence* of the shift from Fordist capitalism centred on industry to a pattern of consumption-driven ‘flexible’ accumulation’.



Figure 3: The old Phoenix Mills chimney. Now part of central Mumbai's premier shopping location, "High Street Phoenix."

The case of High Street Phoenix raises the question of how changes in the built (and thus socio-economic) environment connect to the production of political subjectivity. An answer to this question presents itself in Mumbai based artist Sudhir Patwardhan's *Lower Parel* (see figure 4). Patwardhan's painting brilliantly captures a moment of transition, casting subtle focus on the shifting

⁷⁵ Fieldnote: 05/12/19. High Street Pheonix.

nature of urban reality, in a way that documents the intersection of neoliberal economic restructuring with lived experience. At first glance the scene appears to form an integrated whole. The horizon depicts a derelict mill complex and chimney towards the left. In the top right-hand corner, we see a skyscraper under construction. A bridge linked to a series of staircases connects the street above with the busy market place below. A closer look shows each element of the picture to be distinct and stand out on the basis of its texture and colour (Hoskote, 2010, p. 35). Critically, while the people depicted in the market place appear as a 'tentatively coherent group' they are 'likewise carefully individualised' (Hoskote, 2010, pp. 35-36). Patwardhan's work is insightful because it paints a vision of the city in a nutshell. The painted scene bears witness to a reshaping of the labouring human being, against the background of profound reverberations of (neoliberal) global restructuring, emergence of mass informality and weaving of unbridled competition into the urban fabric.



Figure 4: *Lower Parel* by Sudhir Patwardhan (2001).

Two figures emerge in Patwardhan's scene, the newly affluent individual and the marginalised urban poor. Formally industrial Lower Parel is the new host to a series of gated, air-conditioned spaces of consumption, from luxury apartments to new corporate offices and High Street Phoenix. Socioeconomic change has created conditions in which new wants, needs and desires have emerged (see Harvey, 2005). In its broadest sense *Lower Parel* represents an

altered epistemological space. Entrepreneurialism has been forced onto the working classes and taken up with glee by the affluent. This new rhythmicity brings with it entrepreneurship, individual consumption and material luxury on the one hand, and high unemployment and low job security on the other. Neoliberal Mumbai has risen up out of the urban decay and eerie ruins of industrial production.⁷⁶ While the presence of the organised working classes has receded into fragmented informality, newly affluent citizens have moved into the foreground.

We have seen in the previous section of the chapter that Hindutva was formed in the tensions of India and Empire. With this context in mind, in the contemporary neoliberal era chapters four and five will show that Hindutva has been reconfigured into a 'new' strategy of power in the wake of the global spread of isomorphic forms of the neoliberal state (see Desai, 2007, p. 1). Economic liberalisation after 1991 triggered elite desires for technocratic governance and 'militant disaffection' among the urban and rural poor. Simultaneously, fractions of the Indian bourgeoisie and upper castes that felt under pressure from the process felt besieged by the rise of the lower castes and classes (Mishra, 2013b, p. 142). The rise of the lower castes and classes and anxieties of the upper castes following their relative loss of status (both symbolic and financial) has created new conditions of political possibility. Alongside these shifts, many of the lower castes and classes—whom Modi calls the 'neo middle class'—have been mobilised in support of development and jobs (Chatterji, Blom Hansen and Jaffrelot, 2019, p. 9). This is not to say that the interests of neoliberalism and Hindutva dovetail into a seamless whole, but that these projects are complimentary in so far as they share the same vision and goal of a 'bounded, unitary and individual-based conception of society, as opposed to a community-based society' (Gopalakrishnan, 2006, p. 2803).

⁷⁶ The productive centre of the city is now Dharavi. See Sharma (2000) and Weinstein (2014).

The last task of this chapter is to discuss the Indian National Congress, its decline after 1980 and its role as an enabling force aiding the rise of Hindutva. In tandem with the rising social discontents of Indian neoliberalism, Congress party dominance and the ideology of Nehruvian socialism broke apart in the aftermath of the Emergency (1975-1977) and under the pressure of mass movements of the lower castes and classes (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000; 2012; Desai, 2012; 2015). Following India's gradual shift towards economic liberalisation, the political landscape opened to the influence and organisation of the BJP as the major opposition to the Congress. As we will see, broad rejection of the Congress on the basis of it being deemed corrupt and ineffective cleared the way for Hindutva to become the ideological locus of a newly resurgent India after 1991.

2.5 Congress decline as enabling force

From its inception, as Subir Sinha (2019, pp. 88-89) notes, the Indian National Congress has been both a political party and a movement in its own right. A broad-church home to Gandhians, socialists, liberals and right-wing nationalists (members of the Hindu Mahasabha) at the same time. All manner of political positions and religious denominations were represented under the same umbrella, from the formation of the Congress in 1885, until independence in 1947 and beyond. Yet the attempt of the party to represent the Indian 'people-as-a-whole' in opposition to colonial rule was only ever partially successful, 'large swathes of the population' remained outside and in opposition to the Congress project (Sinha, 2019, p. 88). As will be discussed in depth in chapter three, the Indian National Congress has long blended both secular and Hindu sentiments into an articulation of 'Indian' nationalism. In many respects, 'exclusionary Hinduism' in the articulation of nationalist mass movement, as we will see, can be traced back to the Congress in its transition from a liberal pressure group to a mass party. Nonetheless, with this point in mind, to better understand how Hindutva became the dominant political ideology in the articulation of a resurgent neoliberal India, it will be necessary

to account for the decline of the Congress as the commanding force of Indian politics, as the onset of global (neoliberal) restructuring began to bite.

In terms of development, after 1947 Indian economic growth had been concentrated in large scale infrastructure projects and import-substitution manufacturing. However, despite the official (Nehruvian) socialist orientation of Indian economic development, the spread of social benefits was highly uneven, enriching Indian elites on the one hand and enlarging the educated ‘middle classes’ on the other, all the while further marginalising and impoverishing the vast majority of the urban and rural poor (see Drèze and Sen, 2013). At the dawn of independence, Indian capital waged a highly effective struggle to hamstring the institutional capacity of the developmental state before it even got off the ground. Such was the adverse reaction of the Indian business classes to state-led development, that desperately needed long term investment in education and public health was purposefully subverted (Chibber, 2003). The conservatism of Indian political elites during this time was staggering. As Pankaj Mishra (2013a, p. 51) explains:

‘for people who claimed to be, and are still mistakenly derided, as “socialist”, India’s [Nehruvian] rulers neither matched the educational accomplishments of some socialist countries, nor did they help unleash, like their counterparts in South Korea and Japan, entrepreneurial energies in the country’s protected private sector, which accounted for the bulk of manufacturing output’.

However inadequate in terms of alleviation of poverty and social development, after Nehru’s death in 1964, the so-called ‘Nehruvian consensus’ began to fracture and the party entered a period of fragmentation. A split in the party between the Congress (R) and Congress (O) followed, the former supporting Indira Gandhi’s emergence as Prime Minister in 1967, and the latter opposing

it. In the following years, Indira Gandhi came to solidify her position and reputation following India's comprehensive victory in the Indo-Pakistan war (1971) and India's first successful nuclear bomb test at Pokhran, Rajasthan (1974). However, the 1970s threw up a series of crises for the Congress in terms of India's economic performance, the legitimacy of the party and the rise oppositional anti-Congress politics (Sinha, 2019, p. 93).

By the mid-1970s the global economy had plunged into deep recession. A punishing phase of global "stagflation" (high inflation + unemployment) gripped domestic economies – as fiscal crises cascaded across various locales, state expenditures were radically contracted. In this context, with the onset of a serious crisis of capitalist accumulation, the ISI regime began to run into serious trouble (Harvey, 2006, p. 14). In India, the ISI regime began to crack under the pressure of rising social forces and an increasingly assertive segment of the capitalist class, that 'came to see the system of internal controls and artificial monopolies as an obstacle to their own expansion' (Chibber, 2003, pp. 252-253). Indira Gandhi's preoccupation with the maintenance of political power over economic management had led to a series of disappointing economic outcomes. Between 1965 and 1979, industrial growth decelerated, and public investment declined. Congress' protection of the ISI regime, restrictions on technology imports, strict limiting of exports and hostility to foreign investment, resulted in periodic balance of payments difficulties and serious barriers to economic growth (Kohli, 2010, pp. 125-128). Meanwhile, public revenue was funnelled towards the maintenance of patronage networks geared to support Congress rule (see Kaviraj, 1986; Kohli, 2010). Alongside the gradual implosion of ISI as a viable strategy of capitalist accumulation, then, came a fracturing in the political alliances that sustained the model.

The crisis in India had severe political implications. Most prominently, prolonged economic stagnation rendered Indira Gandhi's highly touted pledge

to ratchet up redistributive policies and “alleviate poverty” increasingly untenable, ultimately consigning it to failure (Kohli, 2010, pp. 125-128). By 1972, the Congress was facing rising accusations of corruption and nepotism both in the states and at the centre. In the context of increasingly difficult economic conditions and a sharp spike in the price of basic commodities, affecting relatively affluent professionals and the poor alike, anti-poverty and anti-corruption protests gripped urban centres across the subcontinent, the prime target was Indira Gandhi herself.⁷⁷ The unrest was widespread: students and workers led protests against misgovernance and corruption in their home states from Gujarat to Bihar (Guha, 2007, pp. 477-478).

Further still, rising discontent in response to deteriorating socio-economic conditions resulted in the formation of an anti-government bloc in the shape of the ‘JP movement’. Mass demonstrations erupted as students and workers took to the streets against rising poverty and corruption, as popular movements began to loosely coalesce under the leadership of Indira Gandhi’s former friend, “Gandhian Socialist” Jayaprakesh Narayan (‘JP’). In June 1975, Mrs Gandhi’s troubles deepened as Allahabad High Court found her and the Congress guilty of electoral irregularities. Ultimately, the potent alliance of the JP Movement, the socialists, and especially the RSS, led to the declaration of the Emergency. The JP movements call for “total revolution,” from the standpoint of Indira Gandhi and the Congress high command, appeared as a war cry of pre-meditated ‘full-scale insurrection’ (Ahmad, 2004, p. 345, Bhatt, 2001, p. 163).

Matters soon came to a head. Indira Gandhi buckled under the pressure of the inflationary situation and the weight of her own paranoia and declared

⁷⁷ A prime example of corruption allegations, and particular sticking point for opposition activists, was Indira Gandhi’s approval of her son Sanjay’s car manufacturing project. Sanjay Gandhi was gifted 300 acres of land from the Congress chief minister of Haryana for a very low price. Most incriminating of all, as Guha (2007, p. 470) points out, was the fact that while ‘eighteen applications were received for a licence to make small cars; only that of the Prime Minister’s son was approved despite his having no past experience in this regard’.

Emergency rule. For Mrs Gandhi, it was the duty of the Congress, to ‘save the country from itself’ and protect the future of Indian democracy from the ‘communal’ and ‘anti-national’ forces of disintegration that were threatening to tear the social fabric of the nation apart (Guha, 2007, p. 493-495). The Emergency lasted twenty-one months. Between June 1975 and February 1977, elections were postponed, the press censored, and over 100,000 people from all over India were jailed under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). Strikes and rallies were banned and the main political opposition leaders, JP, Morarji Desai, and Atal Vajpayee (the latter two were key figures in the future Janata Alliance that was to rout the Congress in the first post-Emergency election) were placed under arrest.

Critically, during this period the government began to shift away from the “Nehruvian consensus” and the strictures of ISI, talking up the benefits of a “pragmatic” economic policy, the virtues of market forces and export-led growth (see Kaviraj, 1986, p. 1706). Indira Gandhi’s ultimate aim, as with any suspension of democracy and implementation of martial law, was the maintenance of national unity in a way that keeps the ruling political class in place. Yet, paradoxically, as we will see, the Emergency prepared the ground for future anti-Congress projects to flourish. In the context of Congress decline after 1980, the aim of Hindutva forces was to accelerate a political project premised on the restoration of upper caste power and promotion of Hindutva values. This took place through the simultaneous delegitimisation of ‘Nehruvian’ socialism and the ‘political authoritarianism’ of the Congress (Desai, 2012, p. 56). The result was a concerted attempt by the Congress to stay relevant in post-Nehruvian India, through articulation of a politics of ‘soft’ Hindutva.

The politics of ‘soft’ Hindutva

In the period after 1980, then, the Congress began to more systematically drop commitments to Nehruvian socialism and state-led development. At the same time, the party began to more openly court – in place of long held secular visions of the nation (however inadequate) – Hindutva themes. With Indira Gandhi's return to power after the Emergency in 1980, the Congress began to lose mass Muslim votes,⁷⁸ as party strategy moved towards the formation of a mass 'Hindu bloc' in a bid to face off secessionist threats in Assam and the Punjab.⁷⁹ Moreover, Mrs Gandhi looked to garner the Hindu vote in an attempt to outgun the BJP, her main rival in the 'cow belt' of the Hindi speaking north. This strategy was not new. For instance, Indira Gandhi had notably attempted to exploit the symbolism of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) 'for her own glorification' back in the late 1960s (Van der Veer, 1994, p. 125).

However, after her return to power in the early 1980s, the Congress' propagation of Hinduism and militant nationalism accelerated, as she moved to set up high profile visits to Hindu temples and shrines in her early weeks in government (Ahmad, 2004, p. 346). This began with an appeal to Hindu communal sentiments in Jammu and Kashmir (an attempt to see off the challenge of the main opposition National Conference in 1982). This strategy was then followed up in the form of militant opposition to Punjabi separatism. Further still, Mrs Gandhi's decision to launch a full-frontal assault on Punjabi Sikh militants in the Golden Temple in 1984 confirmed her to many as a champion of 'Hindu interests' (Ahmad, 2004; Anderson, 2013; Malik, 1987, p.

⁷⁸ It is frequently reported that the Indian Muslim community form a homogeneous block of votes and Bombay Muslims have tended to vote for the Congress in post-colonial India. However, Bombay Muslims through time have never been a monolithic community (see Green, 2011). 'They' have always been divided by regional identity and along sectarian, caste and class lines.

⁷⁹ An insurgency led by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) against the 'internal colonisation' of Assam at the hands of the Indian government was launched in 1979. Insurgent movements in Manipur and Nagaland began in the late 1950s. The states of the Indian north east were placed under the administration of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in September 1958 after being categorised "disturbed areas". The Act, which approximates martial law, remains in force to this day. The Khalistan movement for a separate state for Sikhs in the Punjab region of India gained traction in the late 1970s and reached its zenith in a series of militant activities in the 1980s. This chain of events eventually led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her two Sikh bodyguards. The insurgency collapsed in the 1990s under a heavy crackdown by the Indian government.

151). The Congress thus decisively stoked feelings of vulnerability amongst the Hindu majority and asserted the integrity of Hindu society through the cultivation of bullish nationalist sentiments.

Though of clear importance, it was not Indira Gandhi's courting of religious personalities and visitation of religious sites, but commitment to militant nationalism and her hard-line opposition to separatist claims that won the Congress the Hindu vote (Puri, 1985, p. 149). In a remarkably similar vein to Hindutva ideologues, Indira Gandhi 'aspired to a physically powerful nation'. Strikingly, her nationalism was inspired by 'ancient' Indian glories 'that [took] scant account of the non-Hindu contribution' (Puri, 1985, p. 149). The beginnings of a shift towards 'soft' Hindutva politics thus marked an altered political landscape. As state-led developmentalism began to crack, the pro-poor rhetoric of the Congress was increasingly replaced by a discourse of (Hindu) national identity, security and 'anti-national' threat. The Congress, then, decisively moved to a rhetorical stance of protecting India from so-called 'anti-national' forces. In these conditions, anti-national increasingly began to look like a by-word for anti-Hindu (Guha, 2007, pp. 493-495). It was the duty of the Congress to 'save the country from itself' and protect the future of Indian democracy from the 'communal' and 'anti-national' forces of disintegration that were threatening to tear the social fabric of the nation apart. This unsurprisingly played directly into the hands of the Sangh.

After Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, the legitimacy of Hindutva received a further vitalising shot in the arm from her son Rajiv. Even in the face of the growing anti-Muslim fervour of the RSS-led Ram Janmabhoomi campaign, it was Rajiv Gandhi's Congress that allowed 'Shilanyas' (consecration) of the Ram temple in November 1989, claiming to the public that he would usher in 'Ram Rajya', effectively legitimising the campaign and paving the way for its infamous climax in December 1992 (Banerjee, 2007, p. 3194; also see Sinha, 2019). Paired with his intervention in the Shah Bano

case,⁸⁰ Rajiv Gandhi's time in power resulted in 'a closer entanglement of politics and religion' (Hasan, 2012) and evident break with the so-called secular plural traditions of the Congress. As Zoya Hasan (2012) has noted, these actions led to a severe critique of the Congress as 'pseudo-secular' on the grounds that it had supported reform of Hindu personal law, while endeavouring to not interfere with that of Muslims. This series of events led the Congress to appease Hindutva militants in the case of the Ayodhya dispute.

The destruction of the Babri Masjid would come under the watch of the next Congress Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. In these heady days, the inertia of the Congress and failure to deploy the army and central police forces to protect the Babri Masjid – no doubt for fear of alienating the Hindu vote – all but confirmed the emergence of a soft Hindutva approach, in direct contradiction with the official secular position of the Congress. In practice, then, the Congress was increasingly soft on Hindu fundamentalist currents and increasingly drew from the same tool box of Hindu religious sentiments as the Sangh. This same message of anti-national threat is now peddled by the BJP on a daily basis, and like the cultivation of this discourse by the Congress, the lines between the notion of 'India-under-siege' and 'Hindu-society-under-siege' are purposefully fuzzy (see Guha, 2007, p. 493-495).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the dominant position of the BJP after 2014, the charge of soft Hindutva has continued to be levelled at the Congress, in present times at Indira's grandson (and Rajiv's son) Rahul Gandhi. Perhaps the clearest instance of these logics has been the out and out decision of Rahul Gandhi's Congress to borrow from the 'elements' of Hindutva activated by Modi in order to challenge the BJP (Sinha, 2019). In an intensive campaign set

⁸⁰ *Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum* (known as the Shah Bano case) ended in the Indian supreme court judging that maintenance be awarded under the Criminal Procedure Code to a divorced Muslim woman, undermining Muslim personal law. Under pressure from conservative Muslim leaders, Rajiv Gandhi intervened to nullify the judgement.

to counter the BJP's favoured barb of the "pro-Muslim" character of the Congress in 2017, like his grandmother, Rahul Gandhi went on a tightly choreographed, highly publicised, 'temple run' where he was seen visiting temples and praying with Brahmin priests, garlanded with a Hindu *tilaka* painted on his forehead (see figure 5). The Congress have gone to great lengths to present Rahul Gandhi as a (sacred-thread wearing) 'janendari Brahmin'. In the run up to the Gujarat state legislative elections in 2017, the party machinery went as far as sending out automated messages to their followers featuring the loaded rhetorical question: 'don't you know that Rahul Gandhi is a *janendari* Hindu'? (Jha, 2019). Predictably, the BJP have disputed this claim. More interesting, is that Rahul Gandhi has not backed down, such is the apparent importance of coming across to the electorate as a leader with upper caste Hindu credentials.



Figure 5: 'Janendhari Brahmin' and Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi prays at the Dwarkadhish Temple in Dwarka, Gujarat, 2017.

It is tempting in this light to suggest that following the rise of the BJP after 2014, the Congress – in its desperation – has set off on a mission to gain credibility on the terrain set out by the Sangh and thrown itself into a competition to 'out-saffron' the BJP. Yet this argument elides the importance of the enveloping crisis after 1973 and India's subsequent road to economic liberalisation. The mainstream of Indian politics left 'socialist' aspirations

behind after the Emergency against the backdrop of socio-economic change. In turn, a political space opened up for Hindutva to become critical to the articulation of a resurgent neoliberal India. In this regard, ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ Hindutva are very much two sides of the same coin. Accordingly, the period after 1980 represents the culmination of a slow and gradual metamorphosis – a revolution at the top – in the form of a shift in power from the Congress to the BJP.

Nonetheless, it is most certainly the case that the Congress is no doubt *pragmatically* communal as and when it suits their interests, unlike the Sangh who are most certainly – and indeed openly – ideologically bent on the transfiguration of India into the Hindu rashtra. Yet it is also true that the professed secularism of the Congress has been notably lacking in both colonial and postcolonial periods. In this regard, the Congress has long paved the way for Hindutva forces to become more deeply entrenched within Indian society. After 1980 in particular, with the pursuit of ‘soft’ Hindutva political for electoral gain, in the face of liberalisation and decline of socialist narratives, Hindutva has become pivotal to the political articulation of neoliberalism and its discontents.

2.6 Conclusions

The primary aim of this chapter has been to define key concepts that are put to work in the thesis that follows. The opening section of the chapter argued that Hindutva is a political ideology – that situates itself as *the defacto culture of the nation* – that emerged within the tensions between India and Empire. Through an examination of the historical formation of a singular and unitary Hinduism, it was demonstrated that Orientalist imperial visions and the nationalist visions of conservative Indian elites combined to set in motion a distinctly primordial and racialised understanding of Hinduism, that emerged in opposition to British as well as ‘Islamic’ Empire. Born of this political

conjuncture ideas of caste, race and religion became key in the formation of the future Indian nation.

On the back of this history, it was argued that the RSS gives militant political form to a Hindu ‘chain of reasoning’ (Vanaik, 2017) born within the late-colonial conjuncture of circumstances that beset the Indian subcontinent. The Hindu chain of reasoning relates to what Gramsci understood as ‘common sense’ – a relatively coherent set of religious and ethical ideas that can be mobilised towards ends of politics and power. In turn, key themes of discipline, moral community and the concept of Hinduism as a ‘world-dynamic’ force that were produced through this process became cornerstones of Hindutva. Set against the threat of (predominantly Muslim) enemy forces Hindutva, then, is concerned above all with the nation-state, mass politics and the seizure of political power. Through the organisational backbone of the RSS, Hinduism is mobilised into a nationalist ideology and blended with themes of national culture, blood and soil.

Having offered a definition of Hindutva, the next section of the chapter shifted gear to offer a working definition of neoliberalism and its unfolding in central Mumbai. The transformation of social worlds in Bombay/Mumbai wrought by the globalisation of neoliberalism were discussed with reference to the shift ‘from mills to malls’ that has characterised the landscape of the central city. In the context of neoliberal urbanity, the anxieties of professional classes and upper castes have heightened under pressure from the rise of the lower classes and castes associated with rural-to-urban migration and the rising to prominence of those who Modi calls the ‘neo middle classes’ (Chatterji, Blom Hansen and Jaffrelot, 2019, p. 9). Offering a history of social change in the city and definition of neoliberalism, the discussion that comprised this section set the scene for the analyses of ‘new’ theatrical strategies of Hindutva politics within the tensions of Indian society and the globalisation of neoliberalism that are the focus of chapters four and five.

The final section of the chapter elaborated the decline of the Congress after 1980 and the party's role as an enabling force in the rise to prominence of Hindutva. Despite the many unfulfilled promises of Nehruvian socialism, the project was committed to a *discourse* of secularism, socialism and redistribution. Following its long decline after 1964, the fiscal crises and economic turbulence enveloping the global economy after 1973, and corresponding breakdown of the Indian ISI regime, the official discourse of redistributive policies and avowed mission to 'alleviate poverty' shifted off the Congress agenda decisively. As the Congress came under intense political pressure from mass demonstrations and the rise of the JP Movement, Indira Gandhi buckled and declared a state of Emergency. Which, in turn, gave rise to a strong current of anti-Congress politics spearheaded by Hindutva forces. These anti-Congress political currents pivoted on denunciation of both 'Nehruvian' socialism and the political authoritarianism of Indira Gandhi.

The fall out of these turbulent times led to the deployment by the Congress of 'soft' Hindutva politics. In an attempt to hold onto power and outflank new rivals – primarily the BJP – Indira Gandhi began to more actively propagate Hinduism and 'Hindu interests' paired with an aggressive form of militant, (anti-separatist) nationalist politics. This marked the beginnings of a shift towards 'soft' Hindutva politics as pro-poor rhetoric was negated by appeals to (Hindu) national identity and solidarity in the face of 'anti-national' security threats to the integrity of the nation. The trend continued and indeed accelerated under Rajiv Gandhi and continues under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi. In the wake of socio-economic transformation and the long period of Emergency rule, a political space opened up for Hindutva to become central to the articulation of a newly resurgent neoliberal India. The Congress, rather than represent strong opposition to Hindutva, has been an enabling force in its rise.

As we will see, in the case of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga, focus on the performance of the nation in the street means a focus on urban streets and public spaces. As we have seen, the political objectives and strategic goals of Hindutva must be understood as enmeshed in the contradictions of neoliberal urbanity. Noting the importance of the conjuncture of conditions discussed in chapter one, the next chapter accounts for the social and historical context of the political street that has made the performative, theatrical politics of Hindutva discussed in chapters four and five possible.

Chapter three

Bombay between India and Empire: three movements in the formation of the political street.

‘Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self- consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which — as well as against which - it came into being’.
– Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 12).

‘Streets are not just places where conflicts are shaped and/or expressed. They are also venues where people forge collective identities and *extend* their solidarities beyond their immediate familiar circles to include the unknown, the stranger.’
– Asef Bayat (2017, p. 104).

3.1 Introduction

To begin to answer how and why the ideology of Hindutva has been so effective, to examine the tools deployed to mobilise heterogeneous populations and inquire into what role, if any, the colonisation of urban spaces plays in this process, we need to consider the historical formation of the political street.

‘Modern’ India, as Sumit Sarkar (1989, p. xvi) explains, did not begin with the dissolution of Mughal Empire and with Plassey, but during the decades of the latter half of the nineteenth century where ‘colonial political and economic domination attained its finished apparently stable form’. In terms of counterpoints to colonial rule that developed in tandem – from popular movements to ‘intelligentsia-based all-India nationalism’ – nationalist power has long been dominant over other political forms in Bombay/Mumbai and for the ‘ordinary residents’ of the city, Prashant Kidambi notes, street politics and performance – from protests and riots to festivals and processions – have

given ‘a tangible identity to the nation’ (Kidambi, 2019; see also Masselos, 1976; 1982; 1991).

This chapter accounts for the formation of the political street in three movements that were critical to the anti-colonial struggle in Bombay, but also played important roles in the formation of exclusionary Hindu politics: Ganpati Utsava, the anti-colonial civil disobedience and the city’s communist movement. Streets and public spaces have long been the primary venue of political organisation in the city. On this basis, I argue that among diverse cultural-religious traditions, urban socio-political identities and the rhythms of everyday life, primordial Hindu mythology and anti-Muslim sensibilities have long structured mass political movements in the city. At the same time, leaving an indelible mark on the public culture of the city’s streets and public spaces. The major contribution of the chapter is to set the theatrical colonisation of urban public spaces – the centre focus of this thesis – against a broader historical context that connects anti-colonial nationalism to the politics of exclusionary Hindu nationalism. With this in mind, the chapter offers a solid historical and political-sociological context from which to uncover and explore the politics of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga.

Though dominated by the Indian National Congress, visions for the future of the nation substantially differed between nationalist fractions and the regional context of the various anti-colonial movements in currency. Nonetheless, like the forces of Hindutva, anti-colonial and nationalist political currents as well as the Communist Party of India (CPI) shared a common desire to ‘remould Indian society and even the ‘Hindu community’ (Vanaik, 2017, p. 471). In this sense, the chapter shows how Hindutva has come to dominate the political life of the city off the back of a long history of performative politics rooted in Hinduism as a ‘chain of reasoning’ (as elaborated in chapter two) from everyday religious ritual, to the overtly political.

I begin the chapter by discussing the formation of the (Hindu) political street by way of anti-colonial struggle against British rule in Bombay. In doing so I make two claims: first, through a discussion of the Ganpati Utsava festival at the turn of the twentieth century (3.2) and nationalist civil disobedience campaign in the early 1930s (3.3), I argue that the ‘war of manoeuvre’ launched by the Indian National Congress against colonial rule drew its energy through an equally important ‘war of position’ against Bombay Muslims. Through a process of anti-colonial struggle, the Congress politically mobilised their followers, drawing power and discipline and moulding the movement around the formation of a new imagined community in a Hindu vernacular. I then discuss the equally important legacy for the political street of the gradual implosion of the Bombay communist movement, the politics of Hindu social order, and the communalism and casteism that were left in the wake of communist collapse (3.4).

The extension of ‘Indian accustomed space’ (Rahman, 2019, p. 273) through festivals and collective activities and political organisation in urban public spaces – Ganpati Utsava, Civil disobedience and the politics of the CPI – was aimed against British rule, but also pivoted on the dissemination of Hindu primordial mythology and anti-Muslim sentiments. The concrete segregations and ‘difference’ manifest in the ‘actual’ street were to a significant degree sutured through the production of the political street. In this context, the contribution of this chapter to the thesis as a whole, lies in the provision of a long-wave historical and sociological context to the political articulation of the theatrical, performative mobilisation of imagined community in the political street analysed in chapters four and five.

3.2 Ganpati Utsava: Hindu unity and the ‘alien’ Muslim foreigner

This first section of the chapter looks at the making of Ganpati Utsava (Ganesh Festival) in 1894 and its organisation against the popular Muslim Mohurram

festival in Bombay. While orthodox Brahmin political leaders were important in the foundation of Ganpati Utsava, more importantly, the festival was forged through the lived experience of the political street and negation of the Bombay Mohurram as a popular festival attended by multiple and heterogeneous religio-cultural and social groups. As Ganpati Utsava was transformed from domestic religious observance into a political form of ‘urban public Hindu devotionism’ (Bhatt, 2001, p. 32), Hindu unity was socially engineered in the political street and set against the “alien” Muslim foreigner. In what follows, I discuss the Bombay Mohurram and then its negation following the formation of the Ganpati Utsava. Finally, I discuss the role of Congress “extremist” Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) in the formation of a militant Hindu street politics – though the engineering of performative politics in a distinctly Hindu vernacular – that as we will see, in chapters four and five, continues to have a lasting impact on the city.

The Bombay Mohurram

Theoretically more of a Shia than a Sunni festival, the Muslim Mohurram observances are an expression of mourning following the martyrdom of a grandson of the prophet Muhammad, Husayn ibn ‘Alī, who died at Kerbala in 680 AD. In late-colonial Bombay,⁸¹ Sunni communities took part in the Mohurram with lament, while infusing a number of distinct ‘festive’ innovations into the period of mourning. Each Moholla (neighbourhood) installed model tombs (*tabuts*) during the days of Mohurram, attracting city-wide attention as outsiders went around each different Moholla to visit the spectacular array of tabuts. Each tabut had its own *toli* – a group from each Moholla that would form the parade, mostly consisting of working-class youths, with petty criminal (*badmash*) elements. As the ten days of observance and holding of religious meetings and activities (*mejlis*) ended, the tabuts were paraded from their home turf to the other Moholla’s. This

⁸¹ This account draws primarily on the work of Cashman (1975) and Masselos (1976; 1991).

frequently provoked conflict and fights as the various processions attempted to move through other neighbourhoods. On the final day, the tabuts came together into a grand procession to Chowpatty Beach, where they were immersed in the sea in front of large numbers of spectators. According to some estimates, numbers could reach up to an approximate third of the city's entire population (Masselos, 1991, p. 52). Owing to this format, across the Muslim quarters of the city, the Mohurram took on the appearance of a festival as opposed to religious observance. As Jim Masselos (1976, p. 82) has pointed out, merrymaking, dancing and song animated and bound together the collective practices of the revellers:

‘there were clowns, mimics, acrobats and *fakirs* who, in combination with the *tolis*, gave to the observance of the tragedy of Kerbala an outward mass manifestation of a “saturnalia of not only the Mahomedans but of all the roughs of Bombay of all creeds”.⁸²

Bombay's Mohurram – essentially the city's premier Muslim carnival (Green, 2011, p. 53) – brought a multiplicity of religious attitudes onto the city streets. These differences comprised sectarian and doctrinal differences between Muslims in accordance with the order of proceedings; rivalries between Mohollas and different communities and antagonisms between individuals and groups (Masselos, 1976; 1991). Social fractures within the Muslim population and diversity of Bombay Islams were brought out onto the surface and it was not uncommon for such differences to boil over into open conflict. Most importantly, even European observers, writing as early as the mid-nineteenth century, noted that the Mohurram represented a challenge and even ‘reversal of colonial public order’ (Green, 2011, p. 53; Kidambi, 2007).

⁸² From the *Bombay Gazette*, 25 Feb (1907 p. 4), quoted in Masselos (1976, p. 82)

The Mohurram observances in the city of course changed over time along with shifts in the urban environment. After 1904, when Sunni *toliwallas* attacked some Bohra shopkeepers and following incidences of rioting and violence over the following years – in particular in 1908, after a Shia Julhai toli disturbed Muslims praying in a Sunni mosque – a rethinking of policing in relation to the Mohurram was launched by police commissioner S.M Edwards in 1910. As a result, a series of new regulations, all but banning the tabuts (with the effect of eliminating the problem of tolis) came into force in 1913. By 1912, the *Times of India* was already reporting that “in view of the revised rules recently promulgated by the Commissioner of Police” amongst the participants, “there seemed to be a general disposition not to do anything which would go against the rules”. This, according to the *Times of India*, owed in large part to “the absence of the rowdy element that usually identifies itself with the Mohurram festival in Bombay”.⁸³ To be sure, the decade leading up to the turn of the twentieth century witnessed an acceleration of evermore intrusive colonial policing strategies: marking a shift from ‘indirect’ control to a ‘direct’ approach, targeting the close control of urban neighbourhoods and the emerging ‘native’ public sphere. The timing of this shift was directly related to growing communal unrest and its explosion into urban riots in 1893.⁸⁴ However, there was another reason for the decline of the Mohurram and the end of its time as Bombay’s major festival: the rise of the Ganpati Utsava.

The spatial politics of Ganpati Utsava

It makes sense to examine the decline of the Bombay Mohurram in relation to the emergence of the Ganpati Utsava on the scene, to the extent that many of

⁸³ *Times of India Illustrated Weekly* Jan 10 (1912 p. 28).

⁸⁴ The Acting Commissioner of Police, R.H Vincent posited the view that the Bombay cow protection societies had a significant effect on the ferment of the 1893 riots in the city. His suggestion that the origin of the riots lay in the “anti-cow killing agitation of the Hindus” was echoed in the Anglo-Indian press and by several important city officials. Unsurprisingly, Tilak’s newspaper the *Maharatta* did not share this view, arguing that the Hindus of the city had acted in self-defence and the Muslims and Bombay police were to blame for letting the disturbance escalate. For Tilak, the moral drawn from the events, was that Anglo-Indian officials were concerned to support “Mahomedans against Hindus” (Cashman, 1975, p.68).

the practices of Mohurram were repurposed in an attempt to unite the city's Hindus. As we will see, the role of Congress politician Bal Gangadhar Tilak in the transformation of the festival in the mid-1890s was that of gifted publicist, champion and disseminator of the cause across Maharashtra, from Bombay City and Poona to the rural hinterlands.⁸⁵ Given his relative distance from organisational matters – and the rural peasantry and urbanised working classes in general – it is fair to say that Tilak's major contribution to the birth of the festival relates to his famously 'infectious commentary' on proceedings.⁸⁶ Tilak joined forces with a coterie of Poona-based Brahmins united around orthodox Hinduism, a militant style of politics and opposition to British rule. Ganpati Utsava was politicised, militant and arranged around mythological Hindu themes explicitly geared to stir up animosity and hatred for the "alien" Muslim foreigner (Kaur, 2004, pp. 190-195). The iconography of Ganesha – worshipped by many Hindu sects of both the upper and lower castes – was popularised and politicised, according to Tilak, in order to "bridge the gap between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins."⁸⁷

Marking a transition from a strictly family affair within the domestic sphere to a gala event in the political street, in the 1890s, Ganpati idols (*murti*) that were installed during the festival presented Ganesha in warrior (*Kshatriya*) form (see figure 6). In the lively arena of the political street, collective sentiments around the cultural production of the festival converged. Frequently depicted vanquishing demons, the iconography of Ganesha – the "remover of obstacles" – was constructed to draw attention to the 'glorious

⁸⁵ After 1978, Poona became officially known as Pune, though the latter name has long been in currency.

⁸⁶ There is some debate around Tilak's involvement in the festival on the ground (see Kaur, 2002; 2004). On the question of Tilak's interventions, Raminder Kaur (2004, p. 187) cautions against the production of accounts that align with principles of "elite mobilisation" and pay credence to the "great men" school of history. Tilak's pre-eminence in relation to the festival should not be understated, but neither should the role of other principle figures in 'starting' the festival be ignored. However, it is worth noting that Tilak is credited as the originator of the festival in typical Hindu nationalist accounts. Either way, it is undoubtedly the case that he has become well known as the original and pre-eminent Ganpati festival organiser

⁸⁷ Tilak is quoted at <https://www.indiatoday.in/fyi/story/ganesh-chaturthi-bal-gangadhar-tilak-339232-2016-09-05>, last accessed 20 September 2020.

past' of a Hindu Maharashtra, linking together the essence of Hinduism and idealised purity of "Hindu Raj" (Kaur, 2002, pp. 71-72). The xenophobic discourse of foreign aliens that underpinned the festival, was directed at the European coloniser but also enabled Muslims to be constituted as Other, in so far as the festival pivoted on the creation and assertion of Hindu identity and the 'nationalisation of the masses' in Maharashtra (Blom Hansen, 1999, p. 75). By way of the celebration of martial Hindu identity that animated the festival, Muslim presence was accordingly re-configured as a remnant of the past injustices of Mughal rule and a threat to Hindu society in the present (Bhatt, 2001, p. 33; Cashman, 1975, p. 83-84). The introduction of the popular elephant headed god Ganesha into the political culture of the city, then, blended religious symbolism and festivities with street level political action into a potent brew. In this regard, on the one hand, the propagation of Ganesha in warrior form indicates the formation of a politicised, militant Hinduism in late-colonial Bombay.⁸⁸ On the other, it indicates the formation of the (Hindu) political street through the 'Othering' of urban Muslim communities.

⁸⁸ In a similar way, after 2014, led by the Hindutva outfit Bajrang Dal ('Army of Hanuman'), the Hindu god Hanuman has been transformed from genial monkey-god to an angry, mean looking, militant warrior. In 2016, a new-look militant Hanuman, set against a saffron background, was designed by a young Mangaluru based graphic designer. The image went viral almost immediately and was quickly taken up and co-opted into the iconography of Bajrang Dal. 'Hanuman 2.0' also swiftly garnered the attention and praise of Narendra Modi (Misquith, 2018). Such is the popularity of the image – especially among youth – that it now adorns t-shirts, public transport, walls and the window shields and bumpers of cars and motorbikes all over India. Militant, muscular images from Ganesh to Hanuman, and of course, Lord Rama, adorn the pantheon of Hindutva (Pande, 2018).



Figure 6: the militant *murti*: the Ganesha form portrayed slaying a *Rakshasa* (demon). Image from the Chatrapati Rajaram Ganpati Mandal, established 1892.⁸⁹

In the context of India and Empire, Ganpati Utsava acted as a major catalyst towards the emergence of a particular formation of Hindu common sense in the political street. Simply put, a relatively coherent elaboration of political Hinduism was articulated in and through the celebrations. Although not yet articulated in a fully-worked out form, the idea of a future Hindu nation in Bombay was thus stitched together through the practice of the festival. To be sure, Ganpati Utsava formed an element of the ‘political sharpening’ of a regional, linguistic (elite Brahmin-led) *Maharashtrian* ‘nationalism’ engineered by Tilak. However, it was also combined with a strategy for the (re)invigoration of Hindu traditions and iconography towards a form of all-India nationalism in opposition to colonial rule (Bhatt, 2001, p. 32). In this regard, Tilak’s efforts to shift Ganpati Utsava from the home into the political street, represented a shift in the Congress regarding its relation to the masses.

⁸⁹ This image is taken from Kaur (2004 p. 194).

In Gramscian terms, we can say that Ganpati Utsava effected a ‘connection of feeling between intellectuals and people-nation’ (Gramsci, 2000, p. 350). The political street to borrow from Prashant Kidambi (2019) provided ‘a tangible identity to the nation’ in this context. While historically Ganesha had principally been the deity of Chitpavan Brahmin communities, the primordial narrative of Hindu nationalism pushed by Tilak elided caste distinctions, to mobilise the iconography of Ganesha towards a mass political movement of ‘lower caste’ Hindus (Bhatt, 2001, p. 36). Of the various aspects of Tilak’s plans for the transformation of Ganpati Utsava, the coordinates of this strategy for mass inter-caste mobilisation around the notion of a primordial Hinduism is most important. Remapping the matrix of popular “Hindu” sensibilities and values, Tilak and co were able to establish the terrain on which national transformation might take place. In this light, Ganpati Utsava offers a concrete example of how through the praxis of nationalist organisation, Hinduism was identified and filtered into the production of ‘national-popular’ culture in the political street.

Critically, then, it was not until the transformation of Ganpati Utsava in the early 1890s – as it was moved out of the home and into the street – that the festival became overtly political.⁹⁰ On Richard Cashman’s (1975, p. 77) account, a set of novel innovations into proceedings combined to shape the fundamentals of the festival. First of all, a collective group aspect was forged through the installation of decorated pavilions (*mandaps*) and commission of a public Ganpati sculpture (*sarvajanik*) to become the focal point of collective worship. Both were funded by the collection of subscriptions from the adjoining streets and markets of each neighbourhood. On the tenth and final day of the festival, the *sarvajanik* Ganpatis took part in the final immersion celebration at Chowpatty Beach together.

⁹⁰ The following account of the birth of Ganpati Utsava draws upon Richard Cashman’s (1975) influential *The Myth of the Lokamanya: Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra*.

Second, like the *tolis* of Mohurram, the 1890s re-launch of Ganpati Utsava introduced a movement of singers (*melas*) to each of the sarvajanik Ganpatis. According to Cashman, these singers were ‘often dressed in lavish garb and sometimes dressed as Shivaji’s soldiers, armed with bamboo sticks and decorated with popular emblems of Hinduism’. Third, and critically, for the first time, the *melas* became politically loaded against the politically manufactured idea of the (Muslim) alien foreigner. Take for instance the verses exhorting Hindus to boycott the Mohurram festival sung by the *melas* in 1894:

Oh! why have you abandoned today the Hindu religion?
How have you forgotten Ganapati, Shiva and Maruti?
What have you gained from worshipping the *tabuts*?
What boon has Allah conferred upon you
That you have become Mussalmans today?
Do not be friendly to a religion which is alien
Do not give up your religion and be fallen.
Do not at all venerate the *tabuts*,
The cow is our mother, do not forget her.⁹¹

Somewhat paradoxically, Ganpati Utsava borrowed heavily from the Mohurram celebrations while its champions such as Tilak urged Hindus to boycott the proceedings of the latter (Kaur, 2004, pp. 190-195). By copying dominant aspects of the festivities, the champions of the newly minted *political* festival aimed to recruit Hindu musicians, dancers and artists that had previously attended Mohurram. An interesting aside is that alongside production of a ‘feeling of Hinduness’ yoked to nationalist sentiments, a more pragmatic political aim also preoccupied the festival organisers. Through the organisation of mass protest, Tilak and his contemporaries were able to

⁹¹ Quoted in Cashman (1975, p. 77-78).

suggest that Hindus were unhappy with the perceived pro-Muslim bias of the colonial state, and angry at the non-recognition of Brahmins as the natural interlocutors of the British elites. Likewise, they were able to challenge the British view that Brahmins were out of touch with the masses and that Hindu society was divided (Cashman, 1975, p. 79). It would therefore be inaccurate to frame Tilak and his coterie as simply “men of the people” – there was a high degree of self-interest in their political strategy.

Nonetheless, both festivals were indeed ‘popular’ and well attended: the character of both Mohurram and Ganpati Utsava in Bombay contributed to the production of an expressive landscape of ‘collective accustomed space’ (Masselos, 1991, p. 39). While both festivals consisted of an array of devotional practices, only one would win out to have a lasting *political* imprint on the public culture of the city. In spatial terms, both festivals worked to ‘create allied neighbourhoods that [form] part of each other’s accustomed space (Masselos, 1991, p. 42). The marshalling of Ganpati Utsava against the Muslim Mohurram should thus be viewed as an instance of conflict over, and political mobilisation towards, the management of urban space.

In Ganpati Utsava, the idea of the nation was forged through collective ritual in the political street. Political mobilisation around the symbol of Ganesh – from within the early Congress fold – generated a powerful configuration of common sense anchored in the production of a pervasive atmosphere of ‘Hinduness’. When the spatial politics of Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga are discussed in chapters four and five, we will see the modern analogues to this early example of ‘exclusionary Hinduism’ and its use as a political tool of mass mobilisation to create divisions and apportion communities according to ‘nominal religious affiliation’ (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 33). The exclusionary Hinduism of Hindutva in the political streets of central Mumbai, then, can be traced in part to the political strategy of the Congress ‘extremists’ back in the 1890s. Before moving on to discuss the role of the civil

disobedience campaign in the formation of the 'Hindu' street, let us turn to a discussion of the politics of Bal Gangadhar Tilak in wider context.

The 'extremist' Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a respected and influential member of the Indian National Congress that was active in the organisation from 1890, on and off, until his death in 1920. He was a major figure and part of a newer generation of leaders that aimed directly for independence (*swaraja*) against the official party line of so-called Congress 'moderates', who aimed for reform and representation under the umbrella of British rule. By 1897, Tilak's politics had landed him in serious trouble with the colonial authorities. He was prosecuted for sedition and jailed for eighteen months. It was in the wake of this series of events that he earned the label 'extremist' from the British and the title *lokamanya* ('beloved leader of the people') from supportive elements of the national movement.

Following considerable pressure exerted by a series of nationalist petitions and agitations, Tilak was granted conditional release under Section 401 of the code of criminal procedure. However, given the particular weight of his "extreme" and dangerous views, colonial officials of the Bombay administration viewed the "seditious" Poona Brahmin with deep suspicion. The official mind of the colonial state records the apparent danger that Tilak was seen to pose, the government agreed to his release only on two conditions:

- (i) that he will not countenance or take part directly or indirectly in any demonstrations in regard to this release or in regard to his conviction or sentence.

- (ii) that he will do nothing by act, speech or writing to excite disaffection towards government.⁹²

Beyond keeping Tilak away from the organisation of popular protest, the evident aim of the colonial authorities was to silence one of their most trenchant and popular critics. Yet he was soon to land himself in hot water again. Following the partition of Bengal in 1905, Tilak rose further within the Congress fold, this time to national prominence as a staunch advocate of boycott and passive resistance – methods that as we will see, Gandhi’s civil disobedience movement would later take up with great effect. Around this time and owing to Tilak’s outspoken views and methods of agitation, clashes with Congress moderates became more frequent and in 1908, following his commentary on the Alipore Bomb Case,⁹³ he was again charged with sedition and sentenced to six years in prison. This time, however, Tilak was promptly deported to Mandalay to serve his sentence in isolation from the developing Indian nationalist scene.

Tilak’s enthusiasm for *swaraj* was deemed by the colonial authorities to be a particularly dangerous form of seditious extremism. Yet even a brief glance at his personal writings reveals a more nuanced, ideologically driven portrait of the man. For instance, his book *The Orion, or ‘Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas’* [1893], espouses a primordialist view of Hinduism drawn from late-colonial Orientalist premises (see Bhatt, 2001). In *The Orion*, Hinduism is presented as “Aryan” and the natural and rightful successor to ancient Vedic culture. Tilak was thereby an important popular figure (and member of the Congress fold) to play an early role in the dissemination of ‘Orientalist precepts’ and attach a primordial Hindu mythology to the idea of the nation (Bhatt, 2001, p. 32). Not just in thought but in practice. As we have seen, in

⁹² India Office Records (IOR). ‘Confidential proceedings on the release of Tilak’ IOR/L/PJ/6/497, File 2377: 18 Nov 1898 and ‘The release of Tilak’ IOR/L/PJ/6/490, File 1930: 17 Sep 1898

⁹³ Formally “Emperor vs. Aurobindo Ghosh and Others”, the Alipore bomb case refers to the trial of Bengali nationalists under the official charge of “waging war against the government”. The crime was an alleged attempt (and failure) to blow up the Chief Magistrate of the Presidency Court of Alipore.

organisational form of the Ganpati Utsava, Tilak combined these views with ‘a reconfigured and politicised form of urban public Hindu devotionism’ (Bhatt, 2001, p. 32).⁹⁴ In this way, Tilak prepared the ground for Hindutva in Maharashtra, inspiring figures such as V.D Savarkar and founder of the RSS Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940) (Jaffelot, 2007, p. 85). For these reasons, Tilak remains an extremely popular figure of the anti-colonial struggle for Hindutva forces to this day.⁹⁵

In addition to the tag “extremists” Tilak and co were framed by the British at various stages as dangerous “fanatics”. The motivations of the extremist faction of the Congress and anti-imperialism of Tilak was painted as religiously inspired, irrational and dangerous to British rule. Closer examination reveals these motivations to be irrefutably political.⁹⁶ Tilak’s nationalist strategy was driven by political conviction, in so far as a rationalist logic of anti-colonial sentiment and personal interest in power was articulated through the language of Hindu assertion. This stream of nationalist agitation was situated firmly within the confines of rational political discussion and behaviour, and advanced through the political vehicle of the Indian National Congress. As we will see, the themes developed in the political street by elements of the extremist caucus of the Congress were readily translated into the civil disobedience movement, as the nationalist movement entered a most critical phase.

⁹⁴ In his capacity as a journalist and political activist, primordialist views were widely disseminated through his editorship of two popular weekly newspapers *Kesari* (the Lion) published in Marathi and *The Maharatta* which was published in English.

⁹⁵ For instance, speaking of the greatness of Hindu culture, the second RSS leader (from 1940 to 1973) M.S Golwalkar, referenced Tilak in the same breath as the ‘great warriors and Emperors’ of the ‘Hindu Race’ (Golwalkar, 2007, p. 115). And indeed – in the context of the Ganpati Utsava celebrations – Tilak has been celebrated by the Sangh Parivar as founding father of the national liberation struggle – a project that is unfinished and is to be carried on by the Sangh themselves (Blom Hansen, 1999, p. 263).

⁹⁶ A brief note on the idea of the fanatic. While the ‘fanatic’ has historically been aligned with the idea of religious encroachment into the secular public sphere of colonial-modernity, Alberto Toscano argues for a more nuanced reading that considers the label “fanaticism” under the heading of the politics of abstraction (Toscano, 2010, p. xii). “Figures of extremism” are rendered so at the hands of the state. In an era of colonial rule, the fanatic is configured as he/she who weaponises resources of religious expression and oppositionalism, against social forces of colonial rule and imperial expansion, no matter what their motivations (Toscano, 2010, pp. 14-15). I think we can consider the ‘fanaticism’ of Tilak and co in this light.

3.3 The anti-Muslim character of civil disobedience

Through a close analysis of the civil disobedience movement in Bombay, the aim of this section of the chapter is to reveal a picture of the Congress as deeply implicated in the growth and consolidation of Hindu nationalism. The failure of the Congress to take Muslim aspirations into account within the anti-colonial movement and their *defacto* definition of the nation as Hindu was significant in ‘generating Muslim separatist politics’ and ultimately paving the way to partition (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 380). In this regard, an important shift in the political strategy of the Congress can be traced to 1926, when the Hindu revivalist fringe of M.M Malaviya (1861-1946) attempted to take management of the party into their own hands. After acquiring a firm foothold, these actors effectively displaced Motilal Nehru’s Swaraj Party to become the Congress’ political voice (Tidrick, 2013, p. 211). The political origins of this fringe, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, were firmly of the Hindu right, called for the liberation and organic unity of the “Hindu race” and championed national discipline and military regeneration as the means to combat Hindu ‘subordination’ and ‘emasculatation’ (Jha, 2013, p. 120). Members of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha later went on to found the RSS in 1925 (see Ahmad, 2020).

As we have seen, under the guidance of leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra (and Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal in Punjab and Bengal respectively⁹⁷) an uncompromising struggle against imperialism was anchored in foundations of a highly orthodox Hinduism that drew upon, and openly affirmed the supposed superiority of ancient Hindu ‘Aryan’ civilisation

⁹⁷ Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak were joined by Bipin Chandra Pal to form the famous triumvirate of leading “extremist” nationalists that dominated the nationalist scene from 1905 until the end of the First World War. “Lal-Bal-Pal” were based in the Punjab, Maharashtra and Bengal respectively. Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) was a particularly influential politician at the national level, especially in relation to the increasingly saffron colouration of the Congress. A highly influential member of the party (and after his resignation in 1925, leader of the Hindu Mahasabha) Lajpat Rai unflinchingly called for ‘a clear partition of India into a Muslim India and a non-Muslim India’.⁹⁷ He lobbied for Hindu interests and consistently argued against what he saw as the ‘appeasement of Muslims’ (Bhatt, 2001, p. 70).

(Bhatt, 2001; Dutt, 1949, p. 303).⁹⁸ In the era of Tilak, urban Hindu devotionalism (in the form of Ganapati Utsava) was mobilised to politically articulate primordial Hindu sensibilities and configure the cultural terrain of the political street, as Indian modernity took relatively stable form.

The era of fully-fledged mass anti-colonial nationalism, however, came with the ascent of M.K Gandhi to become the *defacto* leader of the Indian National Congress. Prior to civil disobedience, the Indian national movement came into its own after the First World War, following the arrival of Gandhi from South Africa onto the Indian political scene. The Congress developed into a mass organisation under the tutelage of Gandhi between 1918 and 1923, moving into a position of unrivalled dominance as the primary vehicle of anti-colonial struggle. It is certainly true that during this period the nationalist movement broadened its horizons. Following Gandhi's skilful construction of the non-cooperation movement, the Congress gained a degree of support from significant sections of the Bombay Muslim community and ushered in a new era of mass nationalist politics (Kidambi, 2012).⁹⁹ However, with the breakdown of non-cooperation through the 1920s, tensions between the increasingly powerful "Mahasabha wing" of the Congress, Congress Muslim's and the Muslim League became more intense. As a result, the Congress high command was – not unfairly – attacked with the charge that *swaraj* was a thinly veiled cover for the ultimate political objective of 'Hindu Raj'. Throughout this period, Hindu-Muslim tensions grew as the national movement failed to achieve communal unity (Habib, 1997, p. 43).

Against this background, Gandhi's hope was that the declaration of 'complete independence' (*Purna Swaraj*) as the full aim of the movement and launch of

⁹⁸ Dutt is cited in Cashman (1975).

⁹⁹ Though Gandhi was the key architect, it should be pointed out that this broad wave of support was closely tied to the relation of Shaikat and Muhammad Ali, Abul Kalam Azad and their associates and followers to the Congress. Further still, it is worth noting that Gandhi's formation mass politics under the banner of Hindu-Muslim unity unsettled other smaller minorities, such as the Parsi community (see Patel, 2018).

civil disobedience in 1929 at Lahore, would be a catalyst for leaders of different stripes to settle their differences and come together in a united anti-colonial front (Hasan, 1985). In the event, while the Congress became the dominant force within the anti-colonial nationalist movement it remained very much ‘a party of parties and a movement of movements’ – more anti-colonial front (inclusive of communists, Gandhians, liberals, right wingers and socialists of multiple religious and traditional dispositions) than united around one political position (Sinha, 2019, pp. 88-89). Yet alongside the development of the Congress as a mass anti-colonial front, in the pervasive atmosphere of civil disobedience and its aftermath, as the spirit of anti-colonial resistance swept through the city an increasingly anti-Muslim character to the movement was revealed.

The final section of this chapter (3.4) picks up the key theme of this chapter – the centrality of primordial Hindu mythology to the formation of the political street – in relation to the powerful communist movement in Bombay. First, let us turn to discuss the importance of the political street in what I argue to be the Congress’ ‘war of manoeuvre’ against British colonial rule. In doing so, first, I emphasise the role of Indian nationalist women and concomitant gendering of the political street and then, elaborate the dynamics of anti-Muslim politics embedded within the logics of civil disobedience.

Rallying around the flag

By the 1930s, visions of the future Indian nation had become connected to the ceremonial salutation of the Indian flag. First proposed by Gandhi in 1921, two years later, a *satyagraha* was organised around a newly minted Indian tricolour flag with a spinning wheel emblazoned at its centre at Nagpur (Central Provinces).¹⁰⁰ The protest lasted four months and kick started the life

¹⁰⁰ The term *satyagraha* was coined by Gandhi and translates to something approximating “holding onto truth”. The idea was developed to express the practice of fearlessly, but non-violently, engaging in civil resistance.

of the flag as a potent political symbol representing the aspirations of the Indian nation (Virmani, 1999, p. 171). In Bombay, following a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, it was declared that every last Sunday of each month would be officially designated “Flag Day”. A day to commemorate and celebrate the nation, “flag salutations”, as they came to be known over the next decades to independence, would become a permanent commemorative ritual in the nationalist calendar. As the nationalist movement grew more prominent, salutation of the new flag became a central feature of powerful rituals of collective representation and accelerating nationalist claims over the colonial city (Kidambi, 2012, p. 960).¹⁰¹ At the same time, in the late 1920s, rejection of the Simon Commission by the leadership of all the major parties – and the protests supporting the decision – overlapped with growing worker militancy in the Bombay mill districts. This created an increasingly explosive atmosphere in the run up to civil disobedience (Habib, 1997, p. 47).

From the outset, the format of the civil disobedience movement was designed to intersect with the form and meaning of place. The methods of resistance were clearly outlined in advance and in Bombay, consisted of strikes (*hartals*); processions and parades; the manufacture of salt; picketing and boycotting; and passivity in the face of lathi charges by the police (Masselos, 1985, pp. 75-77). Official accounts of civil disobedience declare the period 12 March – 6 April 1930 and Gandhi’s *Dandi satyagraha*, or ‘salt march’, as pivotal to the struggle. The march took place at Dandi in modern day Gujarat but had an explosive effect in the city of Bombay. The aftermath of the Dandi satyagraha marked a step-up in intensity as civil disobedience was transformed into a wide-ranging coordinated campaign against the British Raj that continued – albeit sporadically and unevenly – well into the 1930s. The role of flag salutation ceremonies in public space (in particular on the Esplanade

¹⁰¹ Officially ‘The Indian Statutory Commission’ – the ‘Simon Commission’ – was set up by the British to study possibilities for constitutional reform, it was made up of seven British MPs that arrived in British India in 1928. The goals of the Simon Commission were of course antithetical to the cause of independence (Swaraj).

Maidan)¹⁰² became more intense during the civil disobedience period and increasingly became a focal point of collective struggle and growing patriotic sentiment.

Unsurprisingly, the flag salutation ceremonies soon came to be viewed as a threat to British rule. The 1930s saw an escalation in the policing of the ceremonies in Bombay and the gatherings were frequently issued immediate banning orders (under Section 23(3) of the Bombay City Police Act). The colonial authorities deployed “elaborate police arrangements” to shut down the ceremonies and disperse the vast crowds they attracted.¹⁰³ One such event culminated in the series of incidents on 21st June 1930 that came to be known as “Black Saturday”. Communications between the Governor of Bombay and Secretary of State for India bluntly outline the decision of the Congress to defy the ban:

“following issue of order by Chief Presidency Magistrate prohibiting drilling of volunteers on Esplanade Maidan in close proximity to Indian regiments, War Council of provincial Congress Committee decided to defy order and hold rally of volunteers previously arranged, at which Pandit Motilal Nehru [Congress President] was to take salute.”¹⁰⁴

Before the rally could get properly started, the police ordered the crowds to disperse and charged. According to the police reports, approximately two-hundred Indians “including five women” were injured.¹⁰⁵ The reference to Congress women/female nationalist observers of the Flag Day ceremonies is significant here, and not just because women played a most important role in

¹⁰² Esplanade Maidan (now Azad Maidan) is the biggest and most central open space in south central Bombay. In the late-colonial period, it was at the geographical centre of colonial rule in the city.

¹⁰³ IOR/L/PJ/6/490: 28th December 1930 p. 10

¹⁰⁴ IOR/L/PJ/6/490: 28th December 1930 p. 10

¹⁰⁵ IOR/L/PJ/6/497: 3rd July 1930 p. 7.

the ongoing campaign. However tentatively, with Gandhi at the helm, the nationalist movement called into question the position of hitherto marginalised groups – women and Untouchables in particular – in relation to the nationalist struggle and the projected image of the future nation. Throughout the period of civil disobedience – from beginning to end – the support and participation of women, especially regarding the intensity and longevity of the struggle was critical. According to the dictates of the Congress, women were to be afforded a new-found dignity and role in society and Untouchables were to be brought closer into the Hindu fold, although there would be no inclusive critique of the patriarchal coordinates of Indian society or critique of caste respectively. These ‘reforms’ were real enough, but the stronger claim here is that the national movement failed to generate a broad critique of Indian social institutions; neither was there a critique of their integration with the norms and values of colonial society (Pearson 1979, pp. 36-37).

Indian womanhood was thus closely tied to the national question. Indeed, colonial-era texts long identified the poor treatment of Indian women as an index of India’s apparently low grade of civilisation (see for example, Mill, 1975, pp. 280-281). In response, (male) Indian nationalists engaged in the discursive construction of a ‘new’ Indian woman distinct from stereotypes of ‘Western’ women and also distinguished from ‘common’ lower caste and class Indian women – ‘new’ Indian woman was in turn subjected to a new patriarchy and placed as the representative of modern Indian culture (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 627). The process of Indian modernity – as colonial-political domination of the subcontinent moved into a ‘relatively stable phase’ (Sarkar, 1989, p. xvi) – was marked by a distinctly gendered division of labour that revolved around the activities of the nationalist ‘middle classes’. As Sanjay Seth (2013, p. 278) points out,

‘the middle-class Indian male had perforce to engage with the colonial civil sphere in order to make a living, and the nationalist had to engage with it in order to acquire the scientific and technological skills needed if India were to liberate itself from foreign rule. In the process, cultural compromises were necessitated. All the more necessary then that the Indian woman, through her religious devotion and her “traditional” dress and demeanour, function as emblem and repository of an identity that was pure and unsullied’.

The advent of Gandhian nationalism, then, marked a change in the discourse of the nation and its women, who as [Seth \(2013, p. 279\)](#) argues ‘signified an Indianness that had to be retained and preserved.’ Following the Dandi satyagraha, nationalist women took part in satyagraha raids on salt works and were the enabling force behind the picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops ([Raman, 2019](#)).¹⁰⁶ As Gail [Pearson \(1979, p. 273\)](#) explains:

‘July [1930] marked a turning point in women’s participation. It saw the first arrest and sentencing of women who held office on the Bombay War Council, the body of the B.P.C.C [Bombay Provincial Congress Committee] that was directing civil disobedience, a further intensification of picketing, the first arrests but not yet sentencing of women picketers and the first mass arrest of women following a procession to celebrate Tilak’s anniversary’.

¹⁰⁶ Alongside carefully selected Congress volunteers, female volunteer associations such as Desh Sevika Sangh and the Gujarati Hindu Stree Mandal organised the collection of seawater, manufacture of salt, and ‘sold and organised picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops’ ([Raman, 2019](#)).

The conclusion of the working committee to step-up civil disobedience at the end of July caused the police to respond with an increasingly heavy hand. On October 26th, 1930, a notorious incident occurred during the Esplanade Maidan flag ceremony where female volunteers were accosted by police and dumped beyond the city limits. The Bombay government noted in internal correspondence that women were becoming increasingly instrumental in the capacity of the Congress to wage civil disobedience.¹⁰⁷ That targeting women would become a strategy of the police to disrupt the protests seems logical in retrospect. Even so, the importance of nationalist agitation in relation to its audience is highlighted by the heavy repression at the hands of the colonial police, where observers (male or female) were treated as if they too were actors in civil disobedience (Masselos, 1985, p. 82).

Following the accosting of the female Congress volunteers from Esplanade Maidan, the national movement and various figures of Bombay high society exploded in outrage of a particular kind. A requisition was signed by twenty-six thousand persons to call a public meeting of protest against the ill-treatment of the women by the police. A telegram was sent by Congress Chairman G.V Deshmukh to the Secretary of State for India that noted the conduct of the police to be “an insult to India’s womanhood and defiance of all decent civilised behaviour”.¹⁰⁸ The sanctity of the woman’s sphere, projected within nationalist discourse as an object of national pride, was to be protected, as opposed to questioned and transformed (Pearson, 1979, p. 37). Women were thus actively and indeed centrally involved in nationalist political agitations. Yet, even so, it is crucial to point out that Gandhi ‘tried to change women’s position without transforming their relation to either the outer world of production or the inner world of family, sexuality and reproduction’ (Kishwar, 1986, p. 28; see also Tambe, 2009).

¹⁰⁷ IOR/L/PJ/6/497 File 6383. p. 10

¹⁰⁸ IOR P&J 6718 p. 10.

The image of (Hindu) Indian woman as patriotic subject thus continued to be seen in relation to the maintenance and preservation of ‘Indianness’ and protection of the domestic sphere of custom and tradition (Seth, 2013). Outside of the home, ‘new’ nationalist woman became a marker for the nation itself – in opposition to sexualised ‘Westernised’ women (and the apparently vulgar, sexually promiscuous lower castes and classes). Out in the world, the purity of India’s women could be maintained, and their femininity preserved and honoured as de-sexualised mothers and goddesses (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 630; see also Ramaswamy, 2010). In contemporary Mumbai, despite the visibility of women in the urban environment, as ‘symbolic markers’ of community and the nation and thereby objects of surveillance and heightened protection, at best, women continue to enjoy conditional access to urban public space (see Phadke et al, 2011, p. 43). The gendering of the political street as male public space, then, has a long history.

Regarding the treatment of Dalits, while Gandhi explicitly recognised the “calculated degradation” to which upper caste Hindus have subjected “the depressed classes” for centuries, he vehemently opposed the proposition of granting them separate electorate. Gandhi decisively won this battle over the great Dalit leader B.R Ambedkar, with the eventual signing of the Poona Pact in 1932. Interestingly, however, the matter for Gandhi was not political, but one of “pure religion”. “Separate electorate”, Gandhi claimed, “is harmful for them and for Hinduism, whatever it may be from a political standpoint.”¹⁰⁹ Thus in 1932, as civil disobedience rolled on, following intense debate around the right to separate electorates (that would enable Untouchables to secure a number of representatives to speak on their behalf in the future legislatures) Gandhi set off to “fast unto death”, effectively forcing the climb-down of Ambedkar.¹¹⁰ The Congress position of ‘uplift’ and reintegration of

¹⁰⁹ IOR/Mss Eur. E. 240.16. Correspondence between Gandhi and Sir Samuel Hoare.

¹¹⁰ For a concise introduction to the debate on the question of caste between Gandhi and Ambedkar, albeit with more emphasis on Gandhi than Ambedkar, see Arundhati Roy’s (2014a) long form introduction “The Doctor and the Saint” to Ambedkar’s famous speech, *The Annihilation of Caste*.

Untouchables into the Hindu fold (under the paternalistic guidance of party workers) was firmly locked in place.

The civil disobedience movement, then, was emblematic of a shifting interplay between social identities, spatial location and (Gandhian) nationalist mobilisation (Raman, 2019). Likewise, as we will see in chapter four in particular, in the context of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, political logics of paternalism, patriarchy and caste hierarchy continue to shape the political street in important ways. Further still, it is crucial to note that the imperative to incorporate these two marginalised groups – under the umbrella of Hindu social order – shines a light on the increasingly precarious position of Muslims. What we see is that the (Hindu) political street radically sutures the heterogenous socio-spatial landscape of the city through the colonisation of space. For present purposes, the concept of the political street also helps make sense of the growing suspicions of Bombay Muslim's to the medium and long-term objectives of the Congress in the event of *Purna Swaraj*. I suggest below that this can be effectively read through the response of Bombay Muslims to the flag salutation ceremonies.

Contesting the flag

Many scholars have argued that in the course of independence the Congress made every effort to work together with Muslim groups (Graham, 1988; see also Guha, 2007).¹¹¹ Over consideration of the communal problem *per se*, the aim of constructing a unified national identity – alongside self-government – according to these scholars, was the party's primary aim. The Congress, it is claimed, must be noted for 'its refusal to abandon secularist and pluralist principles' (Graham, 1988). Yet, multiple revisionist histories have shown that Congress strategy with respect to the communal problem was limited to

¹¹¹ This position has been represented within the writings of the so-called 'Cambridge School'. See for example Low et al (1988).

moderate, diplomatic, attempts to resolve issues at the elite level (Ahmad, 2004; Sarkar, 1989; Vanaik, 2017). Even so, between 1885-1947, agreement between Muslim politicians and the Congress was met only twice: the Lucknow Pact (1916) and the Khilafat/non-cooperation movement (1920-1922). And indeed, ‘when these agreements from the top broke down, Congress appeared bereft of alternatives to resolve communal discord either at the elite or popular level’ (Singh, 1988, p. 191). Simply put, the nationalist activities of the Congress as they unfolded on the ground are not easily separated from the communalism that enveloped Indian society during the late-colonial period (Vanaik, 2017, p 77)

Yet, it is perfectly possible to recognise that *elements* of the Congress high command exhibited secular inclinations. For instance, in *The Discovery of India*, Nehru claimed that “repeated efforts were made by the Congress as well as other organizations to settle this communal problem with the consent of the various groups concerned” (Nehru, 1956, p. 387). He continues: “religion, culture, language, the fundamental rights of the individual and the group, [are] all to be protected”. A brief glance at the writings of the high ranking Indian civil servant and Nehru’s close confidant, V.P Menon, suggests lament at the colonial imposition of separate electorates as effectively incentivising appeals to religious affiliation. Discussing the ‘goals of British policy’, Menon notes that the ‘extremist’ Hindu Mahasabha was established in the same year the All-India Muslim League held its first session – a direct result, he suggests, of Lord Minto’s backing of separate electoral representation in October 1906 (Menon, 1979, pp. 9-10). Be that as it may, the idea that the Congress was ‘unable to escape’ the ferment of communalism is problematic, above all for its omission of agency and rendering of the Congress as passive participant (Singh, 1988, p. 199; see also Vanaik, 2017, p. 77).

Menon’s observation may well be true – it offers us a sound description of historical fact – but it does not recognise any deeper processes underway,

other than the formal implementation of British colonial policy. The unspoken aspect of Menon's position involves taking the pro-Hindu measures of the Congress seriously. Perhaps above all, the rejection of a coalition with the Muslim League in the United Provinces (1937) contrary to the principles agreed within the Lucknow Pact (1916) was seen as particularly divisive (Sarkar, 1989, p. 353).¹¹²

Understood as an effort towards the political reorganisation of space, as we have seen, civil disobedience, productively drew on the celebratory and commemorative rituals of the Flag Day salutations. This is not to say, of course, that political aesthetics of Hinduness were embedded within the new national flag. But rather, as we will see, that the Congress and its political actions in the city – including ceremonial salutations of the Indian flag – increasingly alienated the Muslim community. To give an example of contestations and alternative rituals of flag salutation in the city, we can look to numerous police reports of counter-demonstrations on the Esplanade Maidan.

For instance, a police report from the late 1930s details “a group of Mohammadan volunteers” carrying the green crescent flag and chanting “Inquilab Zindabad!” an Urdu phrase translating to “Long live the Revolution!”.¹¹³ Inquilab Zindabad was coined by the Muslim Urdu poet and freedom fighter Maulana Hasrat Mohani in 1921 and popularised in 1929 by the atheist socialist revolutionary, Bhagat Singh.¹¹⁴ Another report monitoring the Flag Day ceremony, dated 13th November 1930, notes processions carrying Congress flags and separate processions carrying “red flags with the crescent of the Mohammadan's”.¹¹⁵ While the Congress was certainly the central pillar

¹¹² The Lucknow Pact was an agreement to allow ‘overrepresentation’ of religious minorities in provincial legislatures. Its historical importance was the cause of establishing good relations between the Congress and the Muslim League.

¹¹³ IOR CD BL 28th Dec 1930, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Interestingly, in the hands of Hindutva forces, the iconography of Bhagat Singh has since been incorporated into the pantheon of ‘Hindu’ nationalist freedom fighters.

¹¹⁵ IOR CD/BL 1st December 1930, p. 11.

of the anti-colonial movement, evidently, they did not hold an exclusive monopoly over anticolonial/nationalist expression. Despite the attempts of the Congress to represent the Indian ‘people-as-a-whole’ large swathes of the population – including many Indian Muslims – remained outside of the grip of the movement (Sinha, 2019, p. 89).

It is interesting to note, on the flip side, that during the Hindu Diwali festival celebrations of 1930, the Governor of Bombay reported to the Secretary of State for India that many of the city’s merchants had taken to hanging Congress flags, rather than the usual lamps outside their shops as a way to symbolise the victory of light over darkness, as is customary during Diwali.¹¹⁶ As Robert Rahman Raman (2019, p. 273) has noted, Congress workers were mostly Gujarati Hindu and Jain merchants and ‘middle class’ Maharashtrians, it was these cadre that were central to the political spectacles of the movement: ‘the political infrastructure that underpinned the Civil Disobedience movement thus [...] acquired a distinct ‘Hindu’ character’. Accordingly, like the socially engineered cultural production of Ganpati Utsava, we see evidence that the civil disobedience campaign was engaged in the production of nationalist common sense, disseminated through a distinctly Hindu friendly vernacular that worked to transform the ‘actual’ street into the political street. In other words, a new calendar of political festivals was being actively initiated by and in celebration of the Congress.

Nevertheless, it would appear that this new political calendar found little space to incorporate the causes and customs of Bombay Muslims. The Congress War Council’s “Sholapur Martyr’s Day” is a particular case in point. The organisation of this day of commemoration and protest saw a significant stoppage of mills and an approximately eight thousand strong meeting opposite the Dinshaw Petit Mill in Lalbaug was held in connection with the

¹¹⁶ IOR P&J 6126 CD BL. pp. 9-10

execution of the Sholapur prisoners.¹¹⁷ In the evening, over five thousand gathered on the Esplanade Maidan to hear the War Council give an address.¹¹⁸ However, throughout the day, Muslim volunteers had been touring the localities asking shop keepers and businesses not to support the Congress program of action. The official explanation was that while the Congress saw fit to honour the Sholapur Martyrs, they had done nothing to commemorate the death of the revered Muslim leader and leading figure of the Khalifat/non-cooperation movement, Mohammad Ali Jauhar.¹¹⁹ Though only brief snapshots, in these accounts we should pause to appreciate the growing alienation and distance of Muslims from the Congress and growth of Hindu-Muslim tensions *as a result* of the political orientation of the civil disobedience campaign.

The production of Azad Maidan

Prashant Kidambi (2012, p. 959) maintains that the impressive array of political agitations and resistance during non-cooperation worked towards a transformation of the spaces of the colonial city. Yet, to say that the events of civil disobedience in Bombay are similar is at once broadly correct and misleading. The constellation of daring political spectacle and ‘mass choreographed ritual’ that characterised civil disobedience after 1930, was indeed similar to the tactics deployed during non-cooperation between 1920 and 1922. That being said, it was only after 1930 that the Congress began an attempt to lay claim to spaces of the city that had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of colonial elites. The vast Esplanade Maidan formed the centre of the British colonial establishment, both physically and symbolically. And as

¹¹⁷ After imposing martial law in the city of Sholapur the British authorities executed by hanging four anti-colonial nationalists for revolting against the regime on 12th January 1931.

¹¹⁸ However, before the leaders of the War Council could take to a stool to speak, they were arrested, and the crowd was dispersed. Three protestors were shot at the earlier demo at Lalbaug and over the course of the day, 275 were reported injured. No doubt, connected to the heavy police repression throughout the day, around midnight it was reported that the police station at the junction of Sandhurt and Charni Road had been set on fire.

¹¹⁹ IOR P&J 6126 CD 16th Jan 1931. p. 11

Kidambi (2012, p. 959) aptly explains, it is no coincidence that Esplanade Maidan became the 'principle stage of nationalist spectacles and collective defiance and protest'. Accordingly, the Congress renamed Esplanade Maidan, 'Azad Maidan' ('Freedom Park'). During the civil disobedience campaign, then, the colonial authorities in Bombay were constantly challenged by attempts to disrupt the colonial ordering of physical space, where 'native' Indians had been hitherto denied equal rights to the city (see Raman, 2019).

An instance of the Congress' agitation that demands our attention, was the attempt of Congress leaders Vallabhbhai 'Sardar' Patel (1875-1950) and Madan Mohan Malaviya to lead a mass procession in connection with the Tilak birthday celebrations, from Chaupati Road via Sandhurst Road to Azad Maidan.¹²⁰ The proposed route along Hornby Road and Esplanade Road – dissecting the symbolic centre of the British establishment – was met with stern rejection by the Bombay police, who issued a prompt ban on the route under the powers invested in the Bombay Police Act (1902). Led by Patel and Malaviya the Congress defied the order. After being met with a police cordon on Hornby Road, the procession halted at the blockade and sat down in the road for the whole night. According to the court papers, at approximately 6.00am when the Commissioner of Police arrived on the scene, he declared the procession an unlawful assembly and immediately arrested Patel, Malaviya and the other Congress leaders involved. The procession was promptly dispersed and according to the adjoining police report, "the smooth flow of traffic was promptly restored".¹²¹ That the central node of anti-colonial struggle in Bombay became Azad Maidan is further evident given its choice as the venue for Gandhi's address on arrival in Bombay 28th Jan 1931. Such was the hype generated around the figure of 'the mahatma'¹²² that over one

¹²⁰ Malaviya is perhaps most famous as four-time President of the Congress, less well known is his role as co-founder of the Hindu Mahasabha. Vallabhbhai "Sardar" Patel was India's first Deputy Prime Minister, both were closely associated with the 'Mahasabha wing' (Hindu nationalist right wing) of the Party.

¹²¹ IOR P&J 6129 CD 25 September 1930 p. 9

¹²² Gandhi was known to many as the 'Mahatma', which means "Great Soul".

hundred thousand people had gathered on the Maidan to witness Gandhi speak by 6.00pm. Unsurprisingly, the Congress volunteers made sure to distribute the tricolour flag on mass to the people streaming into the Maidan.¹²³

To summarise, I want to argue that the tricolour flag that was planted at the physical/symbolic centre of British colonial life in Bombay, was indicative of the anti-colonialism that the nationalist movement after 1930 came to represent. While competing anti-colonial nationalist projects and political subjectivities inhabited the same space in late-colonial Bombay, the aim of the Congress was to render a new political organisation of space through its transformation into a *nationalist* place of meaning. Moving through the physical space of the central city, the conceived and planned colonial spaces of the British Raj were challenged and overlaid with a new collective ‘lived’ sense of nationalist ownership. However, the sense of belonging that greeted Hindus was matched by the lived experience of alienation from the nationalist cause encountered the Muslim ‘Other’.

The Congress, then, promoted elements of secular nationalism and elements of Hindu nationalism in its role as a movement of movements (Sinha, 2019; Vanaik, 2017). Production of a differential ‘national-popular’ space through civil disobedience was generated by living bodies; valorised through the knitting together of everyday micro-gestures; and scaled up through macro-gestures of Congress ‘high politics’ as the nation was effectively performed in the streets and urban public spaces of colonial rule. Simply put, this process contributed to the formation of a distinctly Hindu “common sense” within the nationalist movement in late-colonial Bombay, that emerged to the detriment of Muslim public presence in the city. This was initiated not by coincidence, but by design. With this in mind, let us turn to the rise and fall of the

¹²³ IOR P&J 6127 CD 27th Jan 1931. Interestingly, this statement appears to point to the priority of the colonial government in this situation, to maintain “order” in the city.

communist movement in the city, with specific reference to the place of primordial Hindu mythology in its structures.

3.4 Communist street culture and its implosion

Though it was not by any stretch of the imagination impossible to be a supporter of both, the major rival in terms of mass political organisation to the Congress in late-colonial Bombay was the Communist Party of India (CPI). The CPI was well established within the city's textile industry – the production of solidarity took place between the factory, the neighbourhood and the street (Chandavarkar, 1994; 2009). In this final section of the chapter, I discuss the legacy for the political street of the gradual implosion of communist mass movement in the city. Specific attention is paid to the politics of Hindu social order, communalism and casteism that crystallised in the wake of its collapse. After the decline of the mills and the textile industry (discussed in chapter two) and collapse of communism as an organising force, Hindutva was ideally placed to fill the vacuum and become the ideology for a resurgent India after 1991. Let us first turn to a discussion of communist street culture, its imprint on the city and its gradual implosion.

In the opening decades of the twentieth century the city of Bombay was the epicentre of industrial capitalism in colonial India. Tightly intertwined with the political logics of the cold war, the central industrial district of Girangaon (literally: 'village of the mills') gave birth to radical urban dreams of a communist future. Two realities in the lives of the mill workers sewed these dreams together. First, the close communion generated through the hardships of the 12-hour working day and overcrowded living conditions of the factory tenements (*chawls*) that the workers had to endure. And second, the cultural production of regional forms of *tamasha* theatre within the district. Migrants from the Maharashtrian hinterlands, the mill workers brought their own regional forms of theatre with them. The discontents of urban industrial life

were accompanied by the establishment of strong community bonds and a sense of solidarity amongst the workers. Respite from the drudgery of the daily grind was found as attempts to deal with the mental, cultural and emotional well-being of the workers were made. After work, one 'went to see a local play, to feel at one with his fellow beings' (Gokhale, 1995, pp. 195-197). In this context, urban streets and public spaces were key to the production of civic community.

If we take a long wave view of social change in the city, we see that the fortunes of Bombay labour owe as much to the rise and fall of the city's industrial economy, as to the ebb and flow of rural connections and networks between the Maharashtrian hinterlands and the city. Indeed, as was pointed out in chapter two, the make-up of Bombay's social formation has been shaped in large part through cognate patterns that persist to this day. From its inception, rural migrant labour powered the textile industry. And in this context, the concentration of the textile industry in the central area of Girangaon in the 1920s and 1930s generated powerful bonds of community (Chandavarkar, 1994; 2009).¹²⁴ Deep relationships of mutual obligation, fostered by communist activism between the neighbourhood, the factory and the streets, were critical to the intense period of industrial action between 1918 and 1947 that served in many respects as a catalyst in the anti-colonial struggle against British rule (Chandavarkar, 2009, pp. 125-127). Solidarity in the streets and utopian dreams of a 'red' future compacted into a powerful counter-movement to rival the mass nationalism of the Congress.

In this regard, in the 1920s and 1930s, the theatre scene in Girangaon was buzzing with CPI activists. A tool of political education as well as entertainment, the primary aim of *tamasha* performances was to engage in

¹²⁴ In addition to the theatre scene, working class institutions ranged from village organisations (*gramastha mandals*), sports clubs (*krida mandals*) and gymnasiums (*vyayam shalas*), to community dining houses (*Khanavalis*) and credit societies (*path pedis*). For a detailed exposition, see Ghadge (2016, p. 164).

the lives of workers (Ghadge, 2016). A popular form of Maharashtrian folk theatre, tamasha (derived from the Arabic ‘playful entertainment’), blends comedy, eroticism and music in a unique way. The narratives of performance lampoon and subvert established monopolies of social power ‘by presenting them in an inverted and often outrageously funny manner through typical characters and situations’ (Pandit, 2004, p. 466). Theatres such as the Hanuman Theatre in Lalbaug provided engaged and responsive audiences for CPI activists – tamasha became an important medium through which local cultural expression was combined with class politics to forge a radical sense of working-class solidarity. Popular performers, drawn primarily from the working classes, fashioned the tamasha tradition into a modified urban form of ‘people’s theatre’ or *loknatya* (Prakash, 2010, p. 213). This highly popular blend of local culture and radical politics produced a potent form of entertainment in an ‘Epic mode’.¹²⁵ Its objective was ‘not so much to develop actions as to represent conditions, and to reveal them’.¹²⁶ As we will see, albeit in contradictory ways, the ‘red flag’ over Girangaon ensured that the presence of the working classes was felt throughout the city.

The seeds of this landscape were sown by the communists, their cadre and the popular support of workers. Indeed, outside of the factory, street life in communist Girangaon has been portrayed as a vibrant meeting place and home to multiple cultural identities. In the context of mass rural-to-urban migration, this has led to notions of a progressive “ruralisation” of the urban landscape.¹²⁷ This implies that rural migrants possess a sense of ingrained tradition and that traditional rural cultures have been imported into the city in the form of ‘primordial’ identities and pre-established notions and practices of

¹²⁵ The overtly political concerns of the *tamasha-loknatya* style is comparable to Bertolt Brecht’s ‘Epic theatre’. This observation has been made by the popular Tamasha writer and director P.L. Deshpande. See for example, his well-known adaptation of Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* (‘Tin paishacha tamasha’.)

¹²⁶ See Benjamin (1998, p. 4) on Brecht’s ‘Epic theatre’.

¹²⁷ This idea that ‘traditional’, ‘communal’ and inegalitarian peasant cultures are imported by rural migrants into the city, has been a central proposition of the Subaltern Studies collective. Consider for example Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2000, p. 213) influential suggestion that power relations in Calcutta’s jute-mills (1890-1940) ‘arose out of a culture that was hierarchical and inegalitarian, subordinating the individual to imagined communities of a distinctly ‘pre-capitalist’ character.

custom and religion (see Chakrabarty, 1993). While there is a certain merit to this position, it is evident that folk-religious and caste customs actively shaped the lives of workers *in relation to a particular sense of place*. This is not to say that migrant communities somehow leave their sense of traditions, custom and subjectivity behind, but rather, that it is problematic to imply that the consciousness of community precludes the possibility of alternative foci of identity and modes of communication (see Bayat, 2010, pp. 186-188; Gooptu, 2001, p. 188).¹²⁸ For example, according to the popular Marathi folk singer Nivrutti Pawar, the district was ‘full of clean maidans’ (open squares). “When you walked down the streets, you would hear *bhajans* and *kirtans*” (Hindu devotional songs), “there were ‘rangoli’ artists that made beautiful paintings’ and sculptors working on Ganpati idols “for the Ganeshotsav in September”.¹²⁹

The vibrant grassroots public presence of the working classes shaped the political landscape and profoundly influenced the civic culture of the city. Yet Girangaon was a predominantly male space. In a similar vein to the Congress-led nationalist movement, there was a strong and continuing attempt by adult males to maintain control over female livelihood and labour. However, the gendered nature of civic life in Girangaon also had much to do with the conditions of female employment. For instance, as legislation was introduced to limit the hours that women could work in the mills (1891) and maternity benefits were granted (1929), even moderate legislative protection resulted in management preference to exclude women from employment as far as possible to maintain flexibility in the market (Chandavarkar, 2009, p. 130). In

¹²⁸ To take Chakrabarty’s argument as given is to render “traditional” culture timeless and static, alongside the implied logic that ‘religious community affiliations and community values’ remain enduringly powerful, to the extent that the poor draw upon them *automatically* (see Gooptu, 2001, p. 186). The main difficulty with this form of reasoning is that it elides the ways in which rural migrants to the urban peripheries of the city create a new sense of identity – in place of the old – inextricably linked to a *sense of place*. The urban, then, does not represent the physical infrastructure of a given cityscape, its population or its geography. Nor is it simply a centre of production and distribution, a node within regional and global circuits. Instead, as Lefebvre (2003, p. 119) notes, the urban milieu is ‘a place of encounter, assembly and simultaneity’ animated by multiple social processes, each defined by their own temporalities. In other words, migrant populations ‘internalise heterogeneous spatio-temporalities depending upon how they orientate themselves between place of origin and settlement’ (Harvey, 1996, p. 52).

¹²⁹ Adarkar and Menon (2004, p. 120).

turn, low levels of formal employment consigned women to low-wage, low-status, irregular ‘informal’ work outside of the mill complexes. An auxiliary effect was that in view of the low-status of women’s work, male workers were given to withdrawing the labour of their wives and daughters in times of economic security, as a mark of personal respectability (Chandavarkar, 2009, pp. 130-131). Taken together, the complex webs of social relations that defined the mill districts, from gendered relations and caste hierarchies, to kinship and village ties, enmeshed individuals in ‘communities of belonging’. Within these exchanges distinctive *urban* identities were forged.

Political subjectivities in Girangaon were therefore actively constructed in the flux of modern industrial work culture and produced through relationships and networks of community between the workplace, the neighbourhood and the street (Chandavarkar, 1994; 2009). A further example is that according to Sitaram Jagtap, workers in the China (Standard) Mills in Sewri – a fully ‘red’ mill – would celebrate May Day outside the manager’s office with red flags and decorations and would put up pictures of pictures of Lenin, Stalin and Marx. The workers would then come and do *namaskars* (bow with hands together) ‘in the traditional way, is if it were a [Hindu] puja’.¹³⁰ The civic and political culture of the communists, then, was both implicitly and explicitly connected to religio-cultural practices of Hinduism – though ‘proletarian’ in their orientation.

This is of course relatively unsurprising given that Hindus, though divided by caste, language, regional and sectarian identities, made up approximately two thirds of the city’s population and thus constituted a significant majority of the industrial working classes. As we will see, this demographic fact had serious political implications. In the intense communal political climate from the 1920s and into the 1940s, under the sway of the Girni Kamgar Union (GKU),

¹³⁰ At the time of interview, Sitaram Jagtap was a 77-year old senior office bearer of the communist Girni Kamgar Union (GKU). See Adarkar, & Menon (2004, p. 165).

the Hindu majority working class played a most important role in the 1929 Hindu-Muslim riots. While recalling Gramsci's (1971, pp. 325-326) maxim that common sense 'takes countless different forms', for many of the mill workers, their 'Hinduness' remained a key aspect of individual identity. Many workers were heavily involved in the riots, as fractures between Hindus and Muslims were weaponised by the mill owners. Let us turn to a discussion of the crystallisation of communalism and caste within the communist movement and its implications for the formation of the political street.

Legacies of communalism

According to the Bombay Riots Inquiry Committee launched in the aftermath of the Hindu-Muslim disturbances of 1929, the communists were largely responsible. Seconding this verdict, the Pearson Committee, appointed to investigate the origins of the riots, claimed that the communists and in particular the GKU were firmly to blame (Chandavarkar, 1994, p. 363). The communists certainly played a pivotal role in how the riots unfolded. But it is important to underscore the strong vested interests of the authorities and the mill owners in casting the GKU as the ultimate villain of the textile business – the GKU was conveniently framed as a force bent on bringing down the industry at all costs (Chandavarkar, 1994, p. 364). By contrast, it makes more sense to understand the nexus between the mill workers and communalism as having structural roots in the city's political economy. The organisation of labour around gendered lines of kinship, caste and religion made the communalisation of conflicts between social groups in relation to the flux of employment levels and labour market competition far more likely. In the event, the underlying cause of the riots lay in the reaction of the mill owners to the militant resurgence of the lightning strike tactics deployed by the GKU in 1928. The response of the mill owners was an attempt to fracture and undermine the strikes by recruiting Muslim workers to break the strikes (Chandavarkar, 1994, p. 422). This was not the first time such tactics had been

employed. Yet, on this occasion, the result was an explosive breakout of city-wide riots.

While it is evidently difficult to trace the *precise act* that set off the riots, according to the police reports on the April and May disturbances, beyond sporadic violence at the mill gates, “Hindu” and “Muslim” heads first clashed in the city on 23rd April 1929.¹³¹ On the day of the Hindu god Hanuman’s birthday (*Hanuman Jayanti*), an “unprovoked” attack was launched on a procession of Hindus on Suparibagh Road. On the approach to the Suparibagh Road mosque, the procession was attacked by a number of Muslims that came out of a lane adjacent to the mosque complex. The report claims that stones and wooden clubs (*lathis*) were put to use by both sides. Seemingly in response to the violence, reports came in that a Muslim youth had been assaulted opposite the showrooms of Turner Hoare & Co, further south on Suparibagh Road. The young man was found unconscious laying by the tram tracks bleeding from wounds to the head. He later died in hospital. Statements made on behalf of those in the procession claimed that a silver idol (valued at Rs.150) had been lifted from the ceremonial handbarrow (*palkhi*). All in all, during the ensuing rioting, thirteen people were reported injured three of which succumbed to their injuries (one Hindu and two Muslims).¹³²

The next episode of mass violence on 27th April 1929 was again connected to a Hindu *palkhi* procession but this time unfolded in the workers chawls at DeLisle Road. The procession was accompanied by Indian drums and cymbals and was led out from the Maruti Temple in front of the DeLisle Road chawls and scheduled to end at Parbhadevi Road. As the procession passed the Parbhadevi Road Mosque, the beating of drums and cymbals stopped, but many of the revellers continued shouting “Jai!”.¹³³ A group of Muslims

¹³¹ It is worth reiterating here the point made in chapter two (2.2) regarding the problem with accepting a clear-cut dichotomy between “Hindus” and “Muslims”.

¹³² IOR/L/PJ/6/1979 23 April 1929. File 1497

¹³³ The Hindi word ‘Jai’ derived from the Sanskrit ‘Jaya’ means ‘victory’. When affixed to a cause it translates as a battle cry. For instance, “Jai Hind!” in translation reads “Victory to Hindustan!”.

standing on the other side of the road began to throw stones and soda water bottles at the Hindus. A series of stabbings ensued.¹³⁴ Following the dispersal of the procession “stray assaults” continued into the night. At 1.00am on 28 April “a small party of Mohammadans”, who were returning from a funeral were passing over the Curry Road bridge. As they reached the foot of the bridge, they were attacked by “a mob of Hindus”. One was killed on the spot and another later died of his injuries in hospital. During this bout of rioting twenty-one were seriously injured three of which died.¹³⁵ Despite the simplistic rendering of the colonial police – of riots between “Hindus” and “Muslims” – taken as a whole, these examples demonstrate a clear territorial factor in the clashes.

Recalling the argument set out in section one (3.2), we can see that these instances were not so much pitched battles as they were examples of violence against those seen to be invading the other groups ‘collective accustomed space’ (Masselos, 1985; 1991). This same pattern applies to the Bombay riots of 1992-1993. Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6th December 1992 at the hands of the Sangh Parivar at Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, thousands of Indian Muslims took to the streets in protest across the country. In the Bombay context the authorities reacted with particular brutality, killing almost two hundred protestors within just a few days. In this context, communal tensions were hugely exacerbated by Hindutva forces, as unsurprisingly the ruling Shiv Sena party proceeded to play a most important role in the ensuing riots (Blom Hansen, 2001, p. 121).¹³⁶ In terms of the scope and scale of urban violence, the Bombay riots were aggressive, indiscriminate and traumatic. Additional to the key role of the Shiv Sena and the BJP, the

¹³⁴ One Hindu man died on the spot and two more were taken to hospital.

¹³⁵ IOR/L/PJ/6/1979 27 April 1929. File 1497

¹³⁶ Although Sena leader Bal Thackeray framed the riots as “justified self-defence” and the violence perpetrated by Hindus as “spontaneous reaction”, Shiv Sena involvement in the riots was no mere happenstance. There is clear evidence of Shiv Sena preparing their activists and compiling lists on the precise location of Muslim residences and Muslim owned businesses (Blom Hansen, 2001, p. 124). Tellingly, in the end, Bal Thackeray and Shiv Sena officials were indicted by the Srikrishna Commission Report for organising and inciting violence against Bombay’s Muslim communities (Frontline, 1998).

Srikrishna Commission Report noted the complicity of the Bombay police, detailing the failure and reluctance to put a halt to ‘incidents of violence, looting and arson’. The report highlights the response of the police to Muslim victims as ‘cynical and utterly indifferent’. In particular, the lower levels of the police and fire brigade were called out for strong pro-Hindu, anti-Muslim bias (Frontline, 1998, p. 5). What this shows is that anti-Muslim sentiments had by this time become a pervasive aspect of majoritarian Hindu culture in the city.

For Shiv Sena – like all Hindutva groups – politics is conducted along Schmittian lines of friend and enemy; Bombay/Mumbai Muslims have been long reduced in an extremely unsophisticated and simplistic way to the enemy of the “Hindu” form of existence.¹³⁷ Alongside and frequently in collusion with the Sangh, Shiv Sena engages in the vulgar construction of Indian Muslims as a dangerous foreign element, ‘Other’ to Indian culture and society (see Van der Veer, 1994, p. 10). Like the above discussions of Ganpati Utsava and civil disobedience, what is important here is not the spectacle of violence in full force. But rather, the fact that the militant political logics that made these spectacular events possible, were cultivated and maintained in the everyday life of the political street. The micro context against which the 1992-1993 riots unfolded was the organisation of so-called *maha aartis*, mass outdoor prayers staged outside Hindu temples in response to the perceived Muslim show of strength represented by Friday prayers (*namaz*).¹³⁸ A renewed sense of urban Hindu devotionality, then, emerged from the sedimented primordial Hindu sensibilities that have long shaped urban experience in the city.

Like the riots themselves, initially, Shiv Sena claimed that the *maha aartis* were “spontaneous” gatherings, although Manohar Joshi – Shiv Sena official

¹³⁷ See Schmitt (1996). For an in-depth examination of the concept of ‘the enemy’ in the work of Carl Schmitt, see Balakrishnan (2006).

¹³⁸ As Gérard Heuzé (2000, pp. 242-243) notes, ‘the Shiv Sena management of mass *pujas* borrows its style from the pavement youth, particularly the loud music and the aggressive pattern of competition for space.’ Throughout the riots the Sena used these mass rituals ‘at first as a field for demonstrating its ability to manage the city, and to appear as an alternative power. Then, it [exploited] this privileged moment when the whole of space belonged to its youth as a kind of symbolic battlefield.’

and later Chief Minister of Maharashtra (1995-1999) – later admitted that they were “organised by the Shiv Sena and the Bharatiya Janata Party” (Frontline, 1998, p. 3). Reinventing the *aartis* ceremony, in which Hindu devotees are offered light – usually a flame and almost always in the setting of a temple or home – Shiv Sena launched *maha* (grand) *aartis*, as mass congregational political events, publishing the schedules of the ceremonies and their location across the city in the Marathi newspaper and Sena mouthpiece *Saamna* (Zavos, 2007, p. 149). As in the case of the Ganpati Utsava, Hindu devotional practices were moved from the domestic setting into the political street. In the event, hundreds of *maha aartis* were performed at various locations within the city for the duration of the riots. The Srikrishna Commission Report was damning: *maha aartis* were explicitly connected to the unfolding communal violence. Following the performance of mass prayers, Hindu mobs spread out into the city in search of the Muslim ‘enemy’. The ultimate aim was ‘purification’ of the urban landscape through violence (Robinson, 2005, p. 75).

In the same vein as the 1992-1993 riots, then, the political street was a most important arena for the disturbances of 1929. Though much smaller in scale, this is confirmed in so far as both the commissioned reports on the riots (of 1928 and 1929) stated that the disturbances originated from within the workers chawls and spilled over into the streets. In addition to this, battles over accustomed space in the city streets spilled over into the official public institutions of the municipality. Take for example an interesting police statement on the fall out of the strikes that records the effect of communal strife on the local municipal primary schools. Here it is stated that “some Hindu students in the Hindu school attended the school with Red Badges on their coats, and as a countermove, some Muhammadan students in the adjoining Urdu school put on blue (mill owners) badges.” The report continues to note that some schools in the mill areas had been closed and were being guarded by the police. Students were reported to have been picketing their respective schools and “Hindu” students were said to be demanding the

removal of the Urdu school from their compound.¹³⁹ Of course, there was – and remains – everyday cooperation between ‘Hindus’ and ‘Muslims’ in the city. Resentment and conviviality around collective religio-cultural identity exist side by side. However, while the 1929 riots were closely tied up to issues of economic vulnerability and the precarious nature of jobs within the industry, by and large these issues were expressed, and battles were fought, around the proxy of perceived threats to accustomed space.

All being said, it must be recalled that the open violence and civic strife that pervaded the mill areas in the late-1920’s suited the objectives of the mill owners. The decision to bus in Muslim workers as strike breakers quickly fermented industrial dispute into explosive communal rioting (Bhattacharya, 1981, p.42; Kidambi, 2012). Yet, either way, the involvement of mill workers in communal riots weakened the possibilities of solidarity between Hindu and Muslim communities. In the event, ‘Hinduness’ and allegiance to ‘Muslim brotherhood’ played an important role in the formation and fragmentation of working-class identities. On the matter of Hinduness – the centre focus of this thesis – in no place was the continuing importance of Hindu identity more obvious than in the everyday politics of caste in the mills. Let us turn to explore attitudes to the problem of caste within the communist movement and the actuality of ‘graded inequality’ manifest in the social relations of the mill workers.

Legacies of caste

A further and arguably more divisive division within the mill worker communities, then, was configured between caste Hindus and “Untouchables”. Between 1901 and 1921, the proportion of Dalits in Bombay city rose above the six to seven percent ratio that they constituted in the wider Bombay Presidency (Morris, 1960, p. 126). Unsurprisingly, some of this

¹³⁹IOR/L/PJ/6/1979 ‘The Bombay Textile Workers Strike Statement no 10’. 29 July 1929.

growing urban population found employment in the textile industry. However, in the communist controlled mills, Dalits were relegated to less well remunerated departments of the factories and effectively barred from the better paid work in the weaving sheds. Hindu Maratha¹⁴⁰ weavers refused to work with so-called Untouchables on the basis of the weaving process itself; workers had to wet the end of the thread with their own saliva to rethread the machines. As Chandavarkar (1994, p. 226) puts it, ‘each time a weft bobbin needed replacement, the yarn had to be sucked onto the shuttle.’ As per the rules of the caste system, Hindu workers, by virtue of working alongside Dalits, ‘risked defilement and pollution’.

A 1940 survey of 37,600 mill workers published by the Bombay Millowners Association (approximately twenty five percent of the industry wide workforce) indicated that nearly fourteen percent of the workforce was drawn from “Untouchable groups”. Some seventy percent of Dalit males were employed in ring spinning and seventy-three percent of females were employed in winding and reeling departments – almost none were employed in the weaving sheds (Morris, 1960, p. 128). While the exclusion of Dalits secured the status of Marathas in their occupation, it was also an important indicator of the wider climate of city politics beyond the workplace (Chandavarkar, 1994, p. 227). Notwithstanding the rhetoric of solidarity emanating from the CPI high command, the practice of “Untouchability” in the communist controlled mills was not confined to the issue of weaving jobs. It was also manifest in the reservation and separation of drinking water for Dalit workers (Omvedt, 1994; Zelliott, 2013).

This clash between the communists and the interests of Dalit workers is well referenced in the agitations of B.R Ambedkar and the Mahar (Dalit)

¹⁴⁰ Marathas are a Marathi-speaking caste of peasant cultivators turned warriors that form the bulk population of Maharashtra.

movement.¹⁴¹ On the exclusion of Dalits from the weaving sheds and in connection to the position of Dalit workers in relation to the 1928 strike, Ambedkar quarrelled with the communists. As he noted at the time:

“this matter was brought up prominently by me. I said to the members of the union that if they did not recognise the right of the depressed classes to work in all the departments, I would rather dissuade the depressed classes from taking part in the strike. They [the CPI] afterwards consented, most reluctantly, to include this as one of their demands, and when they presented this to the millowners, the millowners very rightly snubbed them and said that if this was an injustice, they certainly were not responsible for it”.¹⁴²

Despite calling out this injustice, Ambedkar was rebuffed. No serious action was taken by the CPI for fear of offending caste Hindu workers (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 107). In conjunction with the wave of strikes in the late-1920s, what Gail Omvedt calls the ‘problem of entry’ gained political traction over organising alongside the communists. Dalit workers were concerned with exclusion from employment and sought to remedy their situation. This took precedence over any consideration to throw their lot in with the communists. Indeed, Ambedkar condemned the 1929 strike and urged Dalits to go back to work. In the end, the strike ended in a huge loss for the GKU and Ambedkar held firm, stressing the continued discrimination against Dalit workers and their suffering (at the hands of money-lenders) that resulted as a major consequence of the strike (Omvedt, 1994, pp. 154-155; Zelliott, 2013).

¹⁴¹ The Mahar form a caste-cluster of Maharashtrian Dalits. Ambedkar was himself a Mahar. See Zelliott (2013).

¹⁴² From *Bahishkrut Bharat* 3 May 1929. Cited in Omvedt (1994 p. 154).

The politics of caste therefore caused serious friction between mill workers. The point to take away here is that first and foremost, the communists saw the question of caste and the problem of untouchability as fundamentally unimportant. Additionally, while the communist movement acquired a mass base, the (predominantly Brahmin) upper caste intellectual and political leadership remained separate from the masses. Despite the attempts of workers and comrades residing in the mill districts to produce a communist counter movement to Congress-led nationalism, the upper caste leadership of the CPI continued to practice Hindu lifestyles. Close friendships remained within caste circles and marriage continued to conform to the hierarchical structure of the caste system. Revealingly, no critique of caste society was made within the literature of the movement (see Ilaiah, 2004, pp. 60-61). The practice of caste ran through the workplace and thus much of the membership, as ‘Untouchables’ effectively remained second-class citizens within the CPI. In other words, the Hindu chain of reasoning (sketched out in chapter two) continued to inform the everyday life of Bombay communism.

Ambedkar’s criticism of the communist movement – of its failure to incorporate the concerns of Dalit workers as resting in the upper-caste origins of the communist high command is thereby highly instructive. “A bunch of Brahmin boys” as Ambedkar put it, the communists were prone to thinking about Marxism in Brahmanical terms, privileging the ‘paramountcy of the word (*shabda pramanya*)’. For Ambedkar, Marxism was considered by the intellectuals of the CPI in quasi-religious terms, ‘not [as] a blue print for creative application but akin to *veda vakya* (scriptural authority)’ (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 113). And so, Ambedkar’s misgivings about Marxism were shaped in large part through interaction with the leadership of the Bombay communists, for whom the category of ‘caste’ was ‘unscientific’ and seen to be little more than a ‘superstructural’ division in the homogenous and revolutionary category of the ‘proletariat’ (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 103). A ‘superstructural’ element of the economic system, caste was seen as a ‘pre-modern’ feudal social

condition that would wither away with the inevitable advent of communist revolution (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 103). This state of affairs is further evident in the lack of attention to matters of caste discrimination and untouchability in the programmes of the two ‘mass-front’ movements of the time, the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the Red Trade Union Congress (RTUC). It was not just the communists, but “official” socialist institutions in general that lacked a systematic program geared to fight casteism.¹⁴³

Matters of daily concern to Dalit communities, then, such as temple entry; access to public water tanks; better employment opportunities; social dignity; and so on, were non-issues for the communists. For this reason, as the communist movement fell into a state of collapse, it left the legacy of a retrenched working class (2.4) that was also fragmented by caste identity and communal sentiments. Continuing in the long tradition of city politics in Bombay, communist mobilisation was conducted along lines sympathetic to the cultural affinities of Hinduism (Shaikh, 2011, p. 69). In equal measure, rivalry between Hindu and Muslim workers was exploited and weaponised by the mill owners and communalist forces, further fragmenting the possibilities of solidarity between the working classes of the city. Muslims and Dalits remained largely outside of the communist fold. Simply put, the CPI-led workers movement failed to break with the dominant ‘Hindu chain of reasoning’ characteristic of nationalist politics in the city. In the end, common sense assumptions and sensibilities of ‘Hinduness’ were left intact and cultivated further still, with profound implications for the formation of the political street.

3.5 Conclusions

¹⁴³ Divisions between communists and the Ambedkarite Dalit movement have proven to be lasting. See for example Dalit activist-scholar Suraj Yengde (2016) on the continuing blindness/disregard of much of the Indian left for the caste question. For the Bombay context, mapping tensions between Ambedkarites and communists see the (1997) documentary-film *Jai Bhim Comrade!*

It was argued in chapter two that Hindu nationalism – of which Hindutva is the most prominent and influential variant – was formed in the tensions between India and Empire. The present chapter has shown that the late-colonial ‘internationalist moment’ (see Lewis, 2016; Raza et al, 2014) also gave rise to a powerful communist movement in Bombay that offered a counter position to the cultural nationalism of the Congress. In this chapter I have positioned three movements generated in and through the conjuncture of the late-colonial internationalist moment – as Indian modernity took a relatively stable form – as critical to the historical formation of the political street. Accordingly, it has been argued that Hindu mythology and anti-Muslim politics have been key to the formation of the (gendered) political street and represent important historical legacies that constitute the present.

The chapter showed that by the 1890s, the annual Ganesh celebrations in Maharashtra had moved from the domestic sphere to urban public space under the political sponsorship of Congress ‘extremists’ most prominently, B.G Tilak. At this point, a specifically political dimension came to frame what had hitherto been a set of religio-cultural practices. Anti-colonial activism blended with an elite Brahmin-led militant Hinduism that was explicitly anti-Muslim: Hindu martial identity was celebrated Muslim public presence was denigrated. What Ganpati Utsava represents is the beginnings of a form of Hindu urban devotionism crafted towards political ends (see Bhatt, 2001). Unsurprisingly, B.G Tilak remains an icon of Hindutva forces in the present.

Similarly, as the Congress officially moved towards a strategy of mass nationalist agitation against colonial rule, the streets and public spaces of the city became *the* primary venue of nationalist expression. Civil disobedience in the city was most important in this regard. While the civil disobedience movement was not explicitly ‘pro-Hindu’, it was racked by anti-Muslim sentiments. Like Ganpati Utsava, civil disobedience was pivotal to the

formation of the a 'tangible sense' of nationalist identity (Kidambi, 2019) against colonial rule in the political street.

Finally, whilst the primary counter-movement to Congress-led nationalism articulated an alternate 'proletarian' sense of identity, the CPI failed to depart from the Hindu chain of reasoning outlined in chapter two. These three movements have left an indelible mark on the public culture of the political street. Having accounted for the social and historical context of street politics – and importance of the political street for nationalist political expression in Bombay – chapter four turns to a discussion of 'new' strategies of Hindutva politics. From this point of departure, the nexus of cleanliness, caste hierarchy and the beautification of urban space is the subject of the next chapter, which analyses Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in the context of the performance of the nation in the street.

Chapter four

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: creating a culture of cleanliness

“Mahatma Gandhi had launched a campaign for the independence of the country, which we know as ‘Satyagraha’ movement. Now Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched a campaign of ‘Swachhta’, which is known as ‘Swachagarh’ and its success is being seen across the country.”

– Rajnath Singh, BJP Minister for Defence¹⁴⁴

‘Sanitation is not just about pipes and toilets, drains and costings. It is peopled.’

- Colin McFarlane (2019, p. 4)

4.1 Introduction

The political street in Mumbai forms a venue and site where the public and private blur into one. Everyday life unfolds in every nook, corner and gully. The pavements and so-called ‘slums’ are dense with bodies. High rise blocks shoot up into the sky leaving dilapidated streets far below. In these contested spaces, the surplus wastes of the neighbourhood ‘seep in, coagulate and mount up’ (Mcfarlane, 2019, p. 15). The realities of everyday sanitation – sewer lines, public latrines septic tanks and drainage – form ‘the elementary grid for social relations in the city’; urban limits are set as the population is connected into one city-wide urban ecology (Chandavarkar, 2009, p. 31). From within the heterogeneous density of Mumbai’s urban sprawl, multiple ways of seeing sanitation and cleanliness arise. Stratified by social relations of class, caste and gender, Mumbaikars see the problem of sanitation in remarkably different ways. This produces a range of paradoxes and contradictions.

¹⁴⁴ See ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has become people’s movement, says Rajnath’, *The Hindu*, 8 December, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/swachh-bharat-abhiyan-has-become-peoples-movement-says-rajnath/article30234087.ece>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

The launch of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in 2014 was an ambitious pitch by the newly minted Modi government to initiate a wide-ranging development and sanitation/cleanliness campaign and declare the nation open defecation free by Mahatma Gandhi's birthday (and the 150-year anniversary of his death) on 2nd October 2019. Alongside the elimination of open defecation, under the direction of Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, the corner stones of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (urban) mission include toilet construction, elimination of manual scavenging, investment in solid waste management and oversight and delivery of a wide-ranging public relations campaign. However, as the mission has moved past 2019, thousands of manual scavengers continue to descend into the sewers without proper protective gear on a daily basis.¹⁴⁵ This work is done by Dalits ('Untouchables') the lowest 'depressed', or 'backwards' communities in India's complex caste hierarchy. The work is humiliating, dangerous and reinforces social stigma and discrimination. Many die in the process.¹⁴⁶

Yet, the focus of Swachh Bharat has been the construction and ownership of toilets (over 100 million according to the government) while solid waste management has been relatively neglected; municipalities, Indian railway and state government agencies remain the largest employers of manual scavengers, either directly or through third party contractors. In 2017, Léo Heller, the UN special rapporteur on the Human rights to safe drinking water

¹⁴⁵ Contract labourers that are employed to manually clean sewers and empty septic tanks, while doing the work of manual scavengers, are not considered as such by the government. In this thesis, I consider 'urban sewage workers' as manual scavengers in all but title.

¹⁴⁶ While manual scavenging is officially prohibited by law, the use of men and women for the cleaning of sewers and septic tanks was recognised as manual scavenging only in 2013, in the amended 'The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act'. Government data submitted to the Indian parliament in 2018, claimed that 323 sanitation workers have died on the job since 1993. On the flip side, data collected by the award-winning Sanitation Workers Liberation Mission (Safai Karamchari Andolan) notes at least 1,560 deaths during the same period.

Data from: 'Ramon Magsaysay Award: Indians who have won the award in the past', *The Indian Express*, 27 July 2016,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160727072001/http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/ramon-magsaysay-award-2016-bezwada-wilson-and-tm-krishna-from-india-win-prestigious-award-2938027/>, last accessed 12 May 2020. See also, Nair (2017).

and sanitation, voiced concern that Swachh Bharat would fail to eliminate manual scavenging. Highlighting the link between caste and manual scavenging, he suggested that the mission “may involuntarily contribute to violating the fundamental principle of non-discrimination”.¹⁴⁷ Modi’s flagship sanitation project, then, has neither ended open defecation nor eliminated manual scavenging.

In this chapter, I claim that the missions’ success instead lies in its effective capture of Indian aspirations for cleaner cities (and towns and villages). It works as an effective platform for nationalist mobilisation and serves as a vehicle to co-opt the image and legacy of Mahatma Gandhi for the BJP (and away from the Congress). The chapter shows how Swachh Bharat Abhiyan works as a means of articulation for the ideology of Hindutva through the medium of the political street. In doing so, I account for the framework of cleanliness and sanitation – a seemingly innocuous set of everyday practices – and how it is deployed as a tool to mobilise diverse populations through the colonisation of urban public space.

The argument of the chapter is therefore twofold: first, I argue that Swachh Bharat is not a totalising movement but one that piggybacks on the overwhelming desires of Mumbaikars for a cleaner city. On the back of the catastrophic pollution of urban society, Swachh Bharat figures as a means of articulation to offer the regeneration of urban society through spatial purification. Secondly, I argue that the iconography of Mahatma Gandhi holds the mission together. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan pivots on the ‘ambivalent

¹⁴⁷ In his preliminary report, Heller (2017) was quite clear on the link between caste and manual scavenging, when he claimed that “given the generations-old practice of imposing sanitary tasks onto the lower castes, the growth in number of toilets raises concerns that manual scavenging will continue to be practiced in a caste-based, discriminatory fashion”. In other words, Heller claimed that the delivery of a constitutionally just, “Clean India”, would in the last instance, depend on the ability of the government to address the provision of solid waste management and eradicate manual scavenging. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution inscribes a basic ‘right to equality’ for all Indian citizens. See ‘Why India needs to Address Caste-Based Manual Scavenging Before it Aims for A ‘Swachh Bharat’, *EPW Engage*, 25 June 2018, <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/why-india-needs-address-caste-based-manual-scavenging-swacch-bharat>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

iconography' of Gandhi as a means to mobilise diverse populations. Simply put, Gandhi's ambivalent and varying intellectual and ideological positions lend easily to mean all things to all people. As a result, Gandhi is appropriated by the BJP for political gain, his anti-Hindutva views are erased, and his image is transformed into a meme that aids the production of a sense of imagined (Hindu) political community.

Taken together, these two aspects of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan appeal via the Hindu chain of reasoning as somewhat paradoxically, Hindutva is crystallised in the political street through a secular framework of cleanliness. Through the colonisation of urban public space Hindutva effectively draws energy through the Swachh Bharat Mission. At the same time, the mission generates a sense of imagined political community working together for a Hindutva-friendly 'Clean India'. In what follows, these claims are substantiated by analysing urban aspirations for a clean city and the incorporation of beach clean-up campaigns into the ambit of Swachh Bharat (4.2), the role of caste and class in the making of Swachh Bharat, with special reference to the treatment of urban sanitation workers and goal of the mission to eliminate manual scavenging (4.3), and finally, the propaganda and symbolism of Gandhian iconography that underpin the mission (4.4).

4.2 Towards a clean Mumbai

As was argued in chapter two, the globalisation of neoliberalism in Mumbai has delivered an intensification of already deep seeded social stratification, around the axis of extremely wealthy individuals, those with access to formal employment housing, healthcare and savings, and a precarious and expanding urban poor connected to the informal economy. In the years after 1991, inequality has boomed, as gated communities with swimming pools have emerged in juxtaposition to sprawling slums without regular electricity or running water. The iconic symbol of this glaring inequality is of course Antilia,

the gargantuan twenty-seven story private residence of Mukesh Ambani, India's richest man.¹⁴⁸ Yet, this is simply the most extreme end of the scale. On the ground, Mumbai is peppered with gated apartment blocks; the close proximity of gated communities and 'slums' has become a defining feature of the city. The persistence of mass informal slum settlements has led to multiple claims from elite business and citizens groups that the city demands order.¹⁴⁹

As exchange and the circulation and flow of commodities, money and capital have become increasingly organised around a neoliberal schema of accumulation, so-called citizens groups have cropped up to demand beautification and the better management of urban space. The dreams of such groups – of Mumbai as a 'global city' – are haunted by the vast population of toilers, hawkers and pavement dwellers rendered superfluous in the transition

¹⁴⁸ Antilia is over 400,000 square feet and twenty-seven stories tall. It boasts three helipads, a ballroom, 168 car garage, spa and temple and so on. The existence of the world's second most valuable property (after London's Buckingham Palace) in a city where over half the population lives in slums and on the pavement, has attracted attention to the extravagant excesses of India's billionaire class and their apparent detachment from the hardship and poverty faced by a huge number of their fellow Indians. See Crabtree (2019).

¹⁴⁹ In terms of elite lobbying efforts, see the *Vision Mumbai* (2003) report commissioned by the business and industry group Bombay First (compiled and researched by global consultancy firm McKinsey & Company). Developed 'with the active participation' of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) and Government of Maharashtra (GoM). As well as 'more than 30 key stakeholders (businesses and NGOs), the report argues that if Mumbai is to follow in the footsteps of Shanghai, Singapore (and London, New York and Tokyo) to become a "world-class city", then government and citizens must dump incremental thinking and 'undergo a change in mind-set' to 'convert [this] vision into reality' (Bombay First, 2003, p. vii). On this axis, the proposition was to upgrade and optimise the city's transport infrastructure, in order to support the construction of Central Business Districts (CBDs) and connect them to each other and with high-end residential areas (Bombay First, 2003, p. 16). Alongside the creation of Special Housing Zones (SHZs) and deregulation of land acquisition rules, reforms to the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) process – towards a "user charge" model – were flagged as key priorities. It was also stipulated that no new slums should be allowed to stand after the cut-off point of 1 January 1995 (Bombay First, 2003, p. 21-22). The reports core recommendations proved highly controversial, as critics pointed to the documents heavy skew to the benefit of commercial elites and property developers over slum dwellers, pavement dwellers and the urban poor. The *Vision Mumbai* dream was additionally criticised for its failure to consider issues of informal settlement and sanitation in any real depth. When the city's slums are mentioned in any detail they figure more as markers 'of the city's "slippage" down the rankings of "top" Asian cities'. The explicit recommendation is that if Mumbai is to become a world-city its slums must be cleared (Graham et al, 2013, p. 117-118). The master theme that underpins *Vision Mumbai* is to create islands of (housing and commercial) excellence 'through integrated development', with particular focus on Bandra-Kurla and the former Port Trust and mill lands in central Mumbai. 'Developed holistically' to include high-end housing and apartments, open space, hospitals, retail developments and so on. It is claimed that such "islands of excellence" will become exemplary to the rest of the city and serve as magnets for the attraction of productive capital (Bombay First, 2003, p. 22).

from mills to malls (see chapter two, 2.4). Visions of disorder are both generated and re-enforced through popular culture, for example, in the Bollywood penchant for crime noir.¹⁵⁰ Yet, for the most part, tensions around the control and management of urban public space – the political street – index to a confrontation between those in the minority that see the streets as the ‘circuitry’ of the formal economy in which they walk, shop and commute, and the majority that reside, sleep and ply their trade in the streets. From this angle of vision, street hawkers tend to be at the forefront of attack as roaming vagrants that need discipline (see Anjaria, 2009, pp. 391-392; Rajagopal, 2001, pp. 91-92). ‘Clogging the arteries of the city’, street vendors encroaching on precious public space are a problem that needs to be ‘cleaned up’. Outrage at the apparent ‘nuisance’ caused by hawkers and pavement dwellers dovetails with generalised indignation at the perceived slide of living standards in the city, overcrowding and breakdown of civic virtues, law and order.¹⁵¹ Accordingly, though beautification and ‘clean up’ drives have a long history in postcolonial India,¹⁵² it is in the context of the neoliberal city that we must

¹⁵⁰ Bollywood cinema offers a powerful archive of the city and window into the complexity and multiplicity of subjectivities, lived experience and modes of urban life in the city (Mazumdar, 2007, p. vxiii). Classic depictions of the popular imaginary of the Bombay/Mumbai underworld, street life, slums and pavements, include Mira Nair’s *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) and Ram Gopal Varma’s *Satya* (1998).

¹⁵¹ Hawkers are roundly seen as a nuisance that is taking over the city, causing serious inconvenience and flouting the rules that ‘ordinary’ citizens have to abide by. Field note: 5/12/19. Informal interviews with ‘Prashant’ and ‘Om’. These views are frequently expressed on Twitter groups such as ‘Bandra Community’ and ‘Roads of Mumbai’. See for example, Roads of Mumbai. 2019. ‘Dadar: Hawkers Paradise. No matter which footpath it is.’ *Twitter*, 7 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/RoadsOfMumbai/status/1203269449933033472>, last accessed 9 January 2020. See also Anjaria (2009) and Rajagopal (2001).

¹⁵² The period known as “The Emergency” (1975-77) revolved around sentiments of ‘cleaning-up’ the undesirable elements of Indian society. On the morning of 26th June 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency under Article 352 of the constitution in response to prevailing ‘internal disturbance’. The Emergency, claimed Mrs Gandhi, was a response to “the deep and widespread conspiracy which has been brewing ever since I began to introduce certain progressive measures of benefit to the common man and woman of India” (Guha, 2007, p. 493). The political reality of this period was characterised by the development and roll out of two highly controversial social policies: forced sterilisation under the rubric of ‘family planning’ and mass urban slum clearance, under the direction of Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay. These directives were taken up with gusto by the government of Maharashtra. For instance, note Patrick Clibbens’ (2014, p. 56) account of the demolition and slum clearances in Bombay: ‘during the Emergency, in Bandra East alone, the state “cleaned up” 29,000 square metres of land of workers’ hutment colonies. The land was re-allocated to the Maharashtra State Electricity Board, Indian Oil and the Oil and Natural Gas Commission, for office premises.’ The clearances in Bombay were not organised from the centre, but rather, by figures within the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) and Government of Maharashtra. Furthermore, the connection between untrammelled slum clearance and civic discipline, as Clibbens correctly points out, dovetailed with the other key social policy of the era, forced sterilisation. The

consider how Swachh Bharat Abhiyan connects to urban aspirations and desires for a cleaner Mumbai.

Despite the sheer size of the city, Mumbai doesn't have much of a tourist economy to speak of. The liberalisation of India's economy has brought great wealth to the city, but people do not come to its beaches to bake themselves on a sun lounger. They most certainly do not swim in the polluted waters of the Arabian sea. Instead, the city's beaches are rare open public spaces in a dense and overcrowded city that cater in the main to a local crowd. The beach crowd consists of families and youngsters who come to stroll the sands, grab a bite to eat from food stalls, play a game of football or cricket. Akin to a coastal park, the urban beach is above all somewhere where people come and feel the breeze and escape the hustle and bustle of the city. A place where young couples come to be together, where intimacy is tolerated, and hearts are drawn in the sand. Groups of young men and boys come to loiter and smoke, as trader's weave in between couples with baskets of wares on their head, appealing to the boys to buy a lolly for 'their' girl.¹⁵³ For many, the beach is a place of recreation as well as somewhere to catch some precious sleep away from the noise of the city. The sound of birds replaces the sound of traffic and the cacophony of horns. Yet, if anything catches one's attention in relation to Mumbai's beaches, it is that like India itself, they are uniquely unclean (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 318). Plastic and waste cake the sand and many of the beaches in the city double up as sites for open defecation.

Within the wider context of the push for a Swachh Bharat, desires for beautification and more sustainable forms of development have given birth to a vibrant beach clean-up movement in the city. In recent years, a series of beach clean-up movements have sprung up to tackle the waste and neglect of these spaces. By and large, the discourse of the groups that comprise the

explicit target: 'as in so many of the policies of the Emergency, was the bodies of the urban poor – not their buildings' (Clibbens, 2014, p. 56). Also see Gyan Prakash's *The Emergency Chronicles* (2020).

¹⁵³ Field note: 21/12/19. Dadar Beach, central Mumbai.

movement invariably revolves around the rallying cry to “beat plastic pollution”. The movement as a whole openly connects with the UN Environment Clean Seas Campaign and UN Sustainable Development goals set out for 2030.

While not all of the groups that have sprung up in the city specifically connect with Swachh Bharat, as we will see in the following section, it is difficult to consider them in separation from the broad ambit of the mission. A high degree of autonomy and dissenting opinion marks out differences between the most significant groups. However, in the broader context of Swachh Bharat, the prowess of the BJP is evident to the extent that party strategy recognises and understands the overwhelming demand for cleaner urban public spaces (cities as well as towns and villages). By piggy backing the motivations of independent organisations and networks of individuals engaged in cleaning the city, the BJP gain an advantage. Accordingly, otherwise seemingly disparate groups are seen in the popular imaginary as grass roots ‘citizens movements’ that are honouring the call to cleanliness envisaged by the government – the ‘actual’ street is effectively sutured. I consider the politics of the three most prominent groups in turn.

Cleaning the beach

The contemporary drive to clean Mumbai’s beaches can be traced to October 2015, when local Mumbai citizen Afroz Shah first stepped onto a plastic covered Versova beach with the intention to clean it up. By December 2016, after recruiting a small army of volunteers, significant headway had been made and Shah was honoured by the United Nations as a ‘Champion of the Earth’. The following May, Narendra Modi publicly recognised the efforts of “[his] friend Afroz Shah” in a speech made during his popular all-India radio show *Maan ki Bhatt*. The efforts of Shah and his army of volunteers, then, have attracted much attention. A lawyer by profession, Mr Shah is a shrewd

publicist. Alongside affluent local residents, the campaign has attracted many a famous face, from Bollywood royalty and the Swedish royal family, to a raft of powerful politicians and media personalities. On the political front, the BJP and Shiv Sena in particular moved quickly to back Shah's campaign when (then) Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis and Yuva Sena (Shiva Sena Youth) President Aditya Thackeray joined the clean-up, with official photographers and press and television cameras in tow. No doubt the campaign has been boosted significantly thanks to the location of the beach in Versova, a haven of the well-to-do. At Versova, desires for beautification, the world of celebrity and the political strategy of the ruling class meet on the ground.

The mission to clean Mumbai's beaches has drawn upon keen popular interest in the politics of ocean environmentalism and been driven by social media. Weekly schedules of the various weekend clean-ups are posted on Twitter and Instagram by each group detailing their time, place and date. Organisationally speaking, posts tend to be connected either directly or through reposting to Swachh Bharat hashtags. They frequently tag the Twitter handles of sympathetic politicians, UN Environment and Swachh Bharat goodwill ambassadors, as well as Narendra Modi himself.¹⁵⁴ The combined effect is that a remarkably wide audience is reached.¹⁵⁵ Many of the volunteers spoken to over the course of this research stated that they found their way to the beaches through the strong social media presence of the various groups. They were often particularly impressed by frequent celebrity endorsements. And indeed, it seems to have been the intervention of a Bollywood megastar that kick started the craze. In August 2017, Amitabh Bachchan joined the beach clean-up at Versova, later donating an excavator and tractor to the efforts.¹⁵⁶ By

¹⁵⁴ Additional frequent examples include US actor and environmentalist Leonardo DiCaprio and Indian actress and UN environment/Swachh Bharat ambassador Dia Mirza.

¹⁵⁵ Afroz Shah alone has 48,000 followers on Twitter.

¹⁵⁶ It is difficult to quantify the omnipresence and popularity of Amitabh Bachchan in Mumbai. Besides starring in multiple Bollywood smash hits and hosting India's version of *'Who Wants to be A Millionaire?'* (*Kaun Banega Crorepati*) he is a well-known friend of the rich and powerful. His face is

early September, almost simultaneously, a second wave of beach clean-up groups came into being. The different beach clean-up groups certainly partake in the same bourgeois environmentalist grammar – of beautification, the need to ‘beat’ plastic pollution, and so on – and organise along similar lines. However, while it is tempting to see the movement as a whole, in reality these groups have fomented quite different lines of attack. The beach clean-up movement is highly differentiated.

Founded on 3rd September 2017, ‘Beach Warriors’ openly aligns itself with Swachh Bharat, regularly tagging the Swachh Bharat (urban) Twitter handle as well as the personal accounts of Narendra Modi and (now) Shiv Sena MLA Aditya Thackeray.¹⁵⁷ The Swachh Bharat logo frequently appears pasted onto their promotional material.¹⁵⁸ Like the other groups, Beach Warriors focuses on the matter of changing bad habits around plastic use and littering. However, Beach Warriors differs in so far as their founder, Chinu Kwatra, regularly draws a line between the issue of plastic pollution and the duty of citizens to ‘the nation’. Neglecting to recycle, as Mr Kwatra sees it, is not just to sabotage the environment, but to inhibit development – Beach Warriors, as a matter of duty, ‘want to see [their] Nation clean’.¹⁵⁹ Unlike the group at Versova, which despite receiving the patronage of politicians and the rich and famous is relatively independent, under the direction of Chinu Kwatra, Beach Warriors is closely connected to the Shiv Sena.¹⁶⁰ In particular, the group is close to the Shiv Sena affiliated “I Love Mumbai” foundation spearheaded by prominent Yuva Sena leader, Rahul N. Kanal. Unsurprisingly, the initial project undertaken by Beach Warriors – before spreading out to multiple

a constant in advertisements on buses, shopfronts and billboards in the city, where he puts his famous image to all sorts of products, from banking to noodles.

¹⁵⁷ Former Yuva Sena leader Aditya Thackeray is the grandson of Bal Thackeray and son of Uddav Thackeray. He was elected as MLA for Worli in October 2019. He also serves in his father’s cabinet as Minister for Tourism and Environment.

¹⁵⁸ The Swachh Bharat Logo is discussed in depth in the final section of this chapter (4.4)

¹⁵⁹ Kwatra, C. 2019. ‘Week:120 #BeatPlasticPollution. From Cuffe Parade to Malad. Beaches are getting cleaned & beautified every weekend’, *Twitter*, 8 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/chinukofficial/status/1203723519109918720>, last accessed 4 January 2020.

¹⁶⁰ Kwatra is a Shiv Sena member and supporter of Aditya Thackeray as well as a friend of prominent Yuva Sena Committee member Rahul N. Kanal.

beaches – was at Dadar beach, only a stone's throw from Shiv Sena Bhavan (see figure 7).¹⁶¹ While Beach Warriors is of course not alone in receiving support from local politicians, it is certainly more politically connected on the ground.



Figure 7: Beach Warriors home turf, Dadar Beach: notably the food stalls that line the beach are painted saffron and sport images of Shivaji, Ganesh and the Shiv Sena Tiger (photograph by the author).

At the other end of the spectrum, the political patronage that characterises Beach Warriors is not shared by Mahim Beach Clean Up. The Mahim clean-up was launched by two local residents in September 2017, Indraneil Sengupta and Rabia Tewari. The explicit aim of the project is to clear, re-claim and transform a hitherto neglected stretch of beach from Mahim Causeway to Hinduja Hospital, into a space for recreation and community activities. Like the other groups Mahim Beach Clean Up firmly advocate ecological responsibility and the beautification of urban space. However, the group at Mahim stand out in their resistance to the idea of being closely aligned with

¹⁶¹ Shiv Sena Bhavan is the headquarters of the party organisation, located on the edge of Shivaji Park, Dadar, central Mumbai.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. The view of the group is that Swachh Bharat has targeted a series of 'VIP areas' where the well-to-do move around the city. On the contrary, spaces of the city like Mahim Beach have suffered several decades of neglect. For these local activists, inequality is as a key concern. Their vision is of a clean open public space that offers entertainment for all, in a city where many cannot afford a concert or cinema ticket.¹⁶² The general view from Mahim Beach is that the BMC have plenty of money and that their support for the clean-ups – or lack of – is a simple matter of priorities.¹⁶³

When it comes to the praxis of Swachh Bharat, the Mahim group are keenly aware that there is a difference between what the government say and what they actually do. On this basis, their aim is the creation of an independent, grassroots community project that focuses on building community relations around the collective project of cleaning up the beach. The project has had some real and tangible success.¹⁶⁴ To summarise, the extent to which the growing environmental movement in the city will tolerate the development of Swachh Bharat into a consistent fiction of 'cleanliness' over radical environmental action remains to be seen. All the same, what the three groups considered above have in common is that they think and operate in terms of the beautification of space and emphasise behavioural change and the importance of cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation. What is important, as will be discussed below, is that beach clean-up drives have come to play a key role

¹⁶² Field note: 26/01/20. Conversations with volunteers, Republic Day celebrations at Mahim Beach Clean Up.

¹⁶³ The majority of the waste and debris on the beaches of Mahim and Dadar comes from the Mithi river, a highly polluted eighteen kilometre stretch that begins at Borivali up in the Western suburbs and merges with the Arabian sea between Mahim and Bandra. The Mahim Beach group suggest that what is needed is a water filtration system. While a tractor and broken trailer with a handful of BMC workers at weekends has been allocated, there is a feeling that much more could be done.

¹⁶⁴ New volunteers are being attracted all the time including many people that work in the Mahim area, including staff from Hinduja Hospital. Small yet diverse music events are regularly hosted after the morning clean-ups. For example, on the one hand, around Christmas 2019 a local Christian choir performed a series of carols and a statement was made against the CAA and on the other, the entertainment provided after the Republic Day clean up came from Matunga Labour camp-based hip hop collective, M-Town Breakers. Most encouraging is the level of acceptance, appreciation and trust the clean-up movement has achieved with various local communities. While the aim is undoubtedly to clean the beach, the most impressive feat is the deep connections forged across lines of class, caste and community around a collective project.

within the narrative propaganda of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and formation of the contemporary political street.

Creating a culture of cleanliness

Alongside framing the mission with lofty rhetoric, the protagonists of Swachh Bharat in government have worked hard to create a competitive environment aimed at institutionalisation of the project. This has taken the form of Swachh Survekshan, a time bound twenty-eight day nationwide inter-city competition, billed as ‘the world’s largest cleanliness survey’. Swachh Survekshan began in 2016 (initially covering seventy-three cities) and evolved in a series of stages, starting out as a ‘monitoring tool’ with the aim of becoming a ‘governance tool’ covering the entirety of urban India. The overall aim is to ‘institutionalise Swachhata’ by the 2020 round of the competition. In June 2019, Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Hardeep Singh Puri, announced a further initiative to assess urban cleanliness in three quarters, with each quarter carrying a weightage of two thousand marks to be added to the annual assessment conducted between January and February.¹⁶⁵ The quarterly system is set to play an important role in grading and ranking, with each period weighted at twenty five percent, with six thousand overall marks at stake in the race for India’s cleanest city. The logic behind the ‘continuous Survekshan,’ according to the BJP, is to ensure the pattern of cities cleaning up just before the survey is broken and ‘changed behaviours’ are sustained (Ahuja, 2019).

Swachh Survekshan and the goals of Swachh Bharat in Mumbai, connect on the ground through the activities of the BMC. In the main, BMC strategy has been to harness citizen participation (and enthusiasm) to top-down beautification projects. There are some indications that this strategy has

¹⁶⁵ Singh Puri announced the quarters to run between April and June; July and September; and October and December.

served its purpose and captured the public mood. Take for instance the case of an online poll conducted by the popular actress, Swachh Bharat advocate and UN environment ambassador, Dia Mirza, which recorded 22.2% of respondents identifying with the claim “Swachh Bharat my right”, as opposed to 77.8% of respondents agreeing with the statement “Swachh Bharat my duty”.¹⁶⁶ Enthusiasm for a clean India and the importance of individual responsibility is increasingly expressed in the vernacular of the government-led mission. Under the premise of partnership, a further case in point is the BMC proposed budget of RS 3.57 crore towards a wide-ranging beautification project in association with Mahim Beach Clean Up group.¹⁶⁷ The plan was hatched in November 2019 but formally launched on Sunday 12 January 2020 to align with ‘National Youth Day’ on the birthday of Swami Vivekananda (see figure 8).



¹⁶⁶ Mirza, D. 2019. ‘Had such an energising meeting again with @mybmcSWM and @Dighavkarkiran this morning along with the wonderful @pragyakapoor_’, *Twitter*, 24 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/deespeak/status/1209366082043011072>, last accessed 28 December 2019.

¹⁶⁷ 1 crore is equal to RS 10,000,000. RS 3.57 crore is therefore RS 357,000,000. At the time of writing, £1 converts to approximately RS 0.94. RS 3.57 Crore is therefore roughly £3.7 million.



Figure 8: Shiv Sena inauguration rally – Mahim Beach Clean Up founders and regulars – and puja ceremony to celebrate the beautification plans (photographs by the author).

On the morning of the 12th January 2020 hundreds of volunteers, supporters and a Bollywood celebrity crowd arrived at the beach to begin a somewhat ceremonial clean-up around Mahim police station at the Mahim Causeway end of the beach. A large team of BMC workers were deployed. Shiv Sena set up a stage just behind the beach for the planned inauguration of ‘Mahim Beach Beautification’ after the clean-up at around 11.00am. The team behind Mahim Beach Clean Up have celebrated the beautification plans as a ‘fine example of the joint efforts of citizens and authorities.’¹⁶⁸ However, competing visions over the future of the space quickly emerged. On the one hand, those working on the clean-up since September 2017 have advocated a minimalist approach that retains a ‘natural look’. On the other hand, Shiv Sena Corporator Miland Vaidya summarises the view of the BMC that the plan for Mahim should closely resemble the highly concretised ‘Bandstand’ at Bandra West.¹⁶⁹ When push comes to shove the notion of partnership appears top-heavy in favour of the BMC.

¹⁶⁸ #MahimBeachCleanUp. 2020. ‘Our cleanup on Jan 12, Swami Vivekananda’s birthday, will witness the inauguration of a cherished dream’, *Twitter*, 9 January 2020, <https://twitter.com/mahimbeach/status/1215253447231983616>, last accessed 20 May 2020.

¹⁶⁹ Pinto, R. 2020. ‘#BMC begins #Mahim beach #beautification works from today, here are the works proposed to change the much neglected beach front’, *Twitter*, 12 January 2020, <https://twitter.com/richapintoTOI/status/1216201918386593792>, last accessed 22 January 2020.

In the week immediately following the inauguration, BMC efforts at Mahim commenced with the concreting of a large section of the beach, raising immediate concerns. While such a plan makes the beach easier to clean and for some is more aesthetically pleasing to the eye, it significantly reduces the space of the actual beach. However, these actions make more sense in light of the wider context of urban 'regeneration' being proposed by Shiv Sena and the BMC. Mahim Beach in fact figures in the plans of self-styled environmentalist Aditya Thackeray's 'pet project' for the beautification of Mumbai's 'cultural spine'.¹⁷⁰ The declared aim of which is to create a 'cultural pathway' between Dadar and Mahim, consisting of a uniform, levelled pavement, lined with water fountains, toilets, dustbins and concrete benches along a route linking key religious sites, from St Michaels Church at Prabhadevi, past Makdoom Shah Baba Dargah, Chaitiyabhoomi, and the Siddhivinayak Mandir at Mahim. The plan is to erect bollards to keep scooters and motorbikes at bay and facilitate the smooth flow of devotees that are said to frequent the sites.

Taken together, then, the communications of Swachh Survekshan 2020 connect the popular movement to clean the world's oceans, 'beat plastic pollution' and clean-up Mumbai's urban beaches. In Mumbai, the BMC has been a primary agent in the push to incorporate these themes into a model for sanitation/cleanliness and propagate the idea of 'Swachhata as a lifestyle.' As we will see with respect to the broad 'all-India' strategy of the BJP to communicate the mission of Swachh Bharat (urban) to the masses, the beach clean-up movement has been piggy backed, promoted and effectively metabolised by Narendra Modi himself.

In a well-publicised media event during the informal India-China summit between Modi and President Xi Jinping in October 2019 in Tamil Nadu, Modi's team released a soon to go viral three-minute video of Modi 'plogging'

¹⁷⁰ Aditya Thackeray has made an image for himself as a keen environmentalist. To the delight of his supporters, he has showed an interest in the beach clean-up campaigns and participated on various occasions in well-publicised 'cleanliness drives' in the city.

at Mamallapuram Beach.¹⁷¹ Modi can be seen in the footage strolling barefoot along the beach, collecting up litter and water bottles into a plastic bag (seemingly given to him by his aides) before handing the bag over to a member of the beach hotel staff. In the Tweet launched from his official account, Modi implores Indian's to “ensure our public places are clean and tidy” and “ensure we remain fit and healthy.”¹⁷² In a separate Tweet, four photos of Modi looking calm, contemplative and collected, enjoying a “refreshing walk and exercises in Mamallapuram, along the scenic coast” were posted the same morning (see figure 9).¹⁷³ Taken as a whole, these posts reflect a keen desire on behalf of the Prime Minister and his office to link concerns with plastic pollution, beautification, health, fitness and production of the beach as a recreational space to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. In other words, BJP strategy seeks to accomplish connections between a relatively fluid form of bourgeois environmentalism, civic beautification campaigns and the praxis of Swachh Bharat as envisaged by the government.



Figure 9: Modi ‘plogs’ at Mamallapuram Beach, Tamil Nadu.

¹⁷¹ “Plogging” describes the act of picking up plastic waste and litter while out jogging. Beginning as an organised activity in Sweden, the term was coined by the Swede Erik Ahlstrom in 2016, blending the Swedish word ‘plocka’ (to pick) with ‘jog’, plogging events are now popular in India as well as other countries.

¹⁷² Modi, N. 2019. ‘Plogging at a beach in Mamallapuram this morning. It lasted over 30 minutes’, *Twitter*, 12 October, 2019, <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1182863814217420806>, last accessed 20 May 2020.

¹⁷³ Modi, N. 2019. ‘Refreshing walk and exercises in Mamallapuram, along the scenic coast’, *Twitter*, 12 October 2019, <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1182863131606831104>, last accessed 20 May 2020.

To suggest that the beach clean-up movement has become an important aspect of the propaganda of Swachh Bharat in Mumbai is not to say that it is under the control of the BJP. But that appeal to the aspirations of Indian citizens is part of the strategy of the project. Public opinion is an important source of power and the net objective of Modi's public relations drive here is to connect Swachh Bharat with environmental issues and bourgeois concerns over the management of urban public space, in a way that positions the 'culture of cleanliness' envisioned by the government in common sense terms. Most importantly, the aim of this strategy is to garner greater public support for the BJP. By engaging in a complex appropriation of bourgeois environmentalist claims to the city, Modi positions himself as leading a 'people's movement' from the front. The communications strategy of the project, then, takes the form of a subtle war of position. Modi assumes a position of moral and cultural leadership as the government appears to have taken a lead on environmental issues. This is framed overall as part of a wider concern to establish a culture of cleanliness conducive to a 'clean India'. The everyday bourgeois environmentalism of the beach clean-up movement is duly metabolised by Swachh Bharat.

On this basis, the BJP has piggy backed the motivations of a wide range of actors. At the same time, framing their various commitments as overt pledges of allegiance to the (government-led) production of a Swachh Bharat. Beautification and vanity projects are buttressed by concerns over 'plastic pollution' of the city's streets and beaches. Meanwhile, issues of 'green gentrification' and how to deal with the mass of working-class citizens whose livelihoods rest on ecologically dubious practices – notwithstanding their lack of access to sanitation infrastructure – are effectively sidestepped. What is important, then, is that the imagination and urban aspirations of Mumbaikars are captured by an underlying pitch for the beautification and 'better management' of urban space. Dissensus within the beach clean-up movement

is shoehorned into a streamlined narrative to approximate a unified projection of national-popular will. Accordingly, the affective register of the project evokes the proposition that ‘everyone must do their bit’ in pursuit of a clean India. The aim is an attempt to suture the actual differences and segregations of urban public space around a collective political project.

This notion was succinctly expressed in a quotation from Beach Warriors founder Chinu Kwatra published in the *Bombay Times*. Labelling the celebrations launched to mark the 100th week of cleaning Dadar beach the ‘Big Mumbai Clean Up’, Kwatra told the press that the acronym for the event was a show of respect to the urban sanitation workers of the BMC. For Kwatra, BMC workers “strive and toil to keep our Mumbai city clean”. On this basis, he claimed to dedicate “July 21st as the day for *Safai Karamcharis* of BMC [sic] as these civic workers are our silent heroes”.¹⁷⁴ Kwatra’s narrative mirrors a popular 2019 BMC promotional video produced by the BMC detailing ‘a day in the life of a Swachhata warrior’. The video shows an idealised picture of the life of Mr Kantilal Babriya, a BMC sweeper from M Ward in Chembur and presents his life as one of service to cleanliness, personal piety and commitment to the city and its people.¹⁷⁵ In the next section, we see that in the register of Swachh Bharat, the narrative of the mission as collective endeavour connects with a political strategy for the management of urban public space through the reproduction of Hindu social order. Like the ‘swachatta heroes’ on Mumbai’s beaches every weekend, the narrative follows that like Swachh Bharat’s celebrity cheerleaders and the Prime Minister himself, *Safai Karamcharis* too are ‘doing their bit’ towards a clean India. Making sense of this narrative and its connection to the Hindutva vision of

¹⁷⁴ *Bombay Times, Times of India* 22nd July 2019, p.2 posted on the Twitter feed of Beach Warriors founder, Chinu Kwatra. See Kwatra, C. 2019. ‘Thank you Mumbaikars for making #BigMumbaiCleanup a super hit’, *Twitter*, 22 July 2019, <https://twitter.com/chinukofficial/status/1153158355864576000>, last accessed 20 May 2020.

¹⁷⁵ See the video, in this case shared by popular Bollywood actor Salman Khan. Khan, S. 2019. ‘Thank you Mumbaikars, for joining us each day to inch closer to the #SwachhMumbai of our dreams’, *Twitter*, 26 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/BeingSalmanKhan/status/1210132240077856771>, last accessed 20 May 2020.

samrasta, necessitates a more in-depth engagement with the history of sanitation in the city and its legacy in the present, to which we now turn.

4.3 Everyone's doing their bit: the casteism of Swachh Bharat

Such was the disregard of colonial rule for its Indian subjects that in Bombay, the British developed sanitation infrastructure only in response to the outbreak of plague in 1896 (Kidambi, 2004). The construction of sewers and reconstruction of parts of the 'old town' was related to the desires of the state to manage the spread of infectious disease and quarantine the 'natives' in the instance of any future outbreaks. The foundational basis of Mumbai's urban sanitation problem, then, dates back to the formation of Bombay out of seven islands, as rapid urban growth quickly outpaced the 'sophistication of the towns infrastructure' (Chandavarkar, 2009, p. 33). Initiatives to improve sanitation infrastructure water supply and sewerage were taken most seriously in the wealthy areas of the city. In these spaces, the price of land was high and the dominant classes – Indian elites and especially Europeans – had staked their claim (Chandavarkar, 2009, p. 47; see also Prashad, 2000).

In the absence of rationally planned sewerage, 'Hindu society' as Gita Ramaswamy (2005) argues, 'found it convenient to force [Dalit] madigas and bhangis into manual scavenging'.¹⁷⁶ While the roots of manual scavenging are in the caste system, the practice became institutionalised in British India following the creation of the first municipalities. Manual scavengers were employed to clean sewer lines and public toilets, as well as toilets and latrines located within private households (Swagata, 2019, p. 24). The pattern of inadequate sewers and drainage set in motion by British colonialism persists across the vast majority of the city to this day. As urban planning has been incrementally adjusted in the post-independence era to facilitate rudimentary sewage flow, a reconstituted regime of sewer maintenance has been instituted that continues to rely on the labour of manual scavengers. This history follows

¹⁷⁶ Ramaswamy (2005) is quoted in Viswanathan (2006).

a similar pattern to the development of sanitation infrastructures found in other Indian cities (see Chandavarkar, 1994; Kidambi, 2004; Sreenath, 2019). As does the contemporary history of manual scavenging's reconstitution in twenty first century Mumbai around the institution of contractual and sub-contractual networks.¹⁷⁷

While many labourers working for the BMC as street sweepers, garbage collectors and the like are contracted, those cleaning the city's sewer lines and septic tanks are more often than not sub-contracted day labourers. Typically, a large construction/maintenance contract is awarded and certain elements of the work – for instance the cleaning of sewer lines – is sub-contracted. The corporator knows who the contractors are but the workers frequently don't. They lack written contracts, pensions, access to health care and tend to be generally unaware of their rights. In short, they are given a task on a day rate, if they start asking questions, they quickly find that there is no work the next day.¹⁷⁸ Despite this complex weave of sub-contractual relations, the practice of manual scavenging is in theory legally banned, according to legislation passed in 1993 and updated in 2013.¹⁷⁹

In contemporary Mumbai, two realities combine to perpetuate the persistence of manual scavenging in the city: cost and caste. There are strong cost incentives to hire manual scavenger's sans protective equipment to complete the dangerous and unpleasant work of cleaning septic tanks and sewer lines. The rules of the 2013 Act are often flouted on the basis of ease and cost, thanks to the lack of strict inspection by local authorities, but also due to a general lack of concern for workers.¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Dalits have always been available to perform manual, dirty and dangerous tasks. This 'fact' has to a large extent

¹⁷⁷ See Sreenath (2019) on the issue of contemporary manual scavenging in Bengaluru.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with 'Pooja' 29/01/20, Safai Karamchari Andolan. Interview with 'Antika' 24.12.19, Safai Karamchari Andolan.

¹⁷⁹ The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, and The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with 'Pooja' 29/01/20, Safai Karamchari Andolan.

been internalised amongst caste-Hindu communities – as well as Dalits themselves – as a common sense proposition in line with the Hindu chain of reasoning. Upper caste Hindus are used to having people do things for them; to serve and wait on them and perform the necessary but menial and mundane tasks of daily life. To many, tasks such as manual scavenging fail to jump out as all that different from the other “jobs” that are accorded to Dalits and the labouring castes. The average Indian is well aware of the ongoing practice of manual scavenging¹⁸¹. Though often without commotion deaths are reported in national and local newspapers and across news sites, manual scavenging in municipal areas and scavengers entering manholes on streets and septic tanks within housing complexes are common sights (Vishwanathan, 2006).

This is not to say that the upper castes are necessarily cold and heartless when it comes to the issue of scavenging and the conditions Dalits and the lower classes as such. But rather, that the structural issue of caste (as well as those of class, gender and race) tend to be discussed without recognition of one’s privilege and personal responsibility for perpetuating it (see Yengde, 2019, p. 331). As Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey (2018) point out, caste ‘imparts a ritual power’ to human waste: ‘from early childhood, millions of people are presented with the idea that groups designated by their birth are the appropriate people to carry away human waste and other repugnant material’. For orthodox Hindus these ideas are backed by religious doctrine; for others, the practice of scavenging is simply passed from one generation to another (Doron and Jeffrey, 2018, pp. 99-100). Taken as a whole, the fact of the matter is that in Hinduism, caste hierarchy of labour is normalised.

When it comes to enforcement of the law, a major sticking point for flouting the rules of the 2013 Act comes down to the matter of an extremely hazy definition of what actually constitutes manual scavenging in the first place. The Act gives definition of “Sanitation Workers” (*Safai Karamcharis*) as ‘any

¹⁸¹ Interview with ‘Pooja’ 22/12/19, Safai Karamchari Andolan.

person engaged in or employed for any sanitation work, other than domestic work' (2.h) but fails to offer any precise description of manual scavenging.¹⁸² The Act itself contains no detail on the bare minimum protections. Further still, there has been absolutely minimal action from the government to clarify the rules in the public domain. Rather than back the cause of livelihood and dignity of sanitation workers and support the manual scavenging ban through strict enforcement of the law and clarification of the rules, the BJP has gone to great lengths to spin a narrative that spiritualises sanitation workers. Led by Narendra Modi from the front, it is widely accepted that Safai Karamcharis are rightly – and justly – contributing to the creation of a clean India, they do their bit like everyone else.

In doing so, Modi imitates and echoes Mahatma Gandhi's controversial views on manual scavenging. Commenting on the *bhangi* (sweeper) Gandhi argued that manual scavenging was 'a most honourable occupation' and one of many vital services upon which Indian society was sustained. Indeed, in 1936, Gandhi suggested that

'a Bhangi does for society what a mother does for her baby. A mother washes her baby of dirt and insures his health. [...] the Bhangi protects and safeguards the health of the entire community by maintaining sanitation for it. The Brahmins duty is to look after the sanitation of the soul, the Bhangi's that of the body of society.'¹⁸³

There is little distance, then, between Gandhi's views on caste and of Hindutva ideals of samrasta. At Gandhi's insistence, the (successful) aim of the Poona Pact (1932) was to deprive 'Untouchables' of the right to political representation through separate electorate granted to them at the 1931 Round

¹⁸² See Appendix 1 (2013 Act/rules.)

¹⁸³ Gandhi writes in *Harijan*, 28th November 1936, cited in Ramaswami (2005, p. 90).

Table Conference (Yengde, 2019, p. 142). Likewise, in the wake of the Poona Pact, Gandhi renamed Untouchables ‘Harijans’ (‘Children of God’) and commenced a long campaign to open temples to the ‘Harijans’ and further integrate them into the Hindu fold. At all costs, the primary aim was to ‘Hinduise’ the Untouchables to counter the potential of their political awakening (Roy, 2014a, pp. 182-183). For Gandhi, manual scavenging and dignity were not mutually exclusive – the duty of the Bhangi was ‘sacred’ and ‘pure’ – caste distinctions could be supported, and Untouchability could be opposed without any apparent contradiction (see Bhuyan, 2016). The social harmony platform (samrasta) of the RSS, geared to ‘integrate’ Dalits into Hindu society without disrupting the hierarchy of caste takes a remarkably similar tact. The idea behind it is unity, not equality (Palshikar, 2020, p. 179).

This view of the virtues of the caste system and its occupational division of labour is shared by Modi, who like Gandhi has too has referred to manual scavenging in terms of a ‘spiritual experience’.¹⁸⁴ In a collection of speeches titled *KarmaYog*, published in 2007 (but later withdrawn from circulation) Modi wrote of the *balmikis*, a community of manual scavengers, and claimed that he didn’t believe

‘that they have been doing this job just to sustain their livelihood... At some point of time, somebody must have got the enlightenment that it is their duty to work for the entire society and the Gods; that they have to do this job bestowed upon them by the Gods; and that this job of cleaning should continue as an internal spiritual activity for centuries’ (Modi, 2007, pp. 48-49).¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Comparison of the striking resemblance between Gandhi’s comments on caste and manual scavenging and Modi’s commentary on the *balmikis* and his claim that manual scavenging is a ‘spiritual experience’, has been made by Bhuyan (2016), Ramaswami (2005, p. 90) as well as Sagar (2017). See also Teltumbde (2018, pp. 332-333).

¹⁸⁵ Modi is quoted in Teltumbde (2018, p. 333).

In this context, it is unsurprising that the narrative propaganda of Swachh Bharat chooses to glorify sanitation workers, rather than condemn the continued existence of a dangerous and humiliating occupation. Further still, it is unsurprising that Gandhi is placed at the centre of the official discourse of cleanliness that underpins Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Bhuyan, 2016). Of the five primary Swachh Bharat Abhiyan objectives what concerns us here is the pledge to ‘eliminate manual scavenging’ (2.1.2).¹⁸⁶ The substance of the guidelines on ‘objective 2.1.2’ proclaim that the identification of all manual scavengers in urban areas is to be pursued at state level. Insanitary toilets linked to their employment are to be upgraded alongside ‘adequate’ rehabilitation of said manual scavengers.¹⁸⁷ Yet there is a clear disconnect between the literature and leadership on the issue. For instance, quizzed by Sagar of *The Caravan* about the efforts to eradicate manual scavenging within the mission, Jagan Shah, Director of the National Institute of Urban Affairs simply replied “*Aur usko jyada tawajjo nahi diya gaya*” (It was not given much consideration)’ (Sagar, 2017).¹⁸⁸ The professed aim to eradicate manual scavenging with the official literature is evidently not matched by the priorities of those in charge of the mission.

It is of course correct to say that the construction of sanitary toilets is a key factor in the mission to eradicate manual scavenging. Yet as new toilets have been constructed they more often than not end up being cleaned by ‘rehabilitated’ manual scavengers’.¹⁸⁹ Despite their construction, many lack

¹⁸⁶ Curiously, it should be noted that the elimination of manual scavenging does not feature as a mission goal in the Swachh Bharat (gramin) literature.

¹⁸⁷ See Appendix 1, p.10.

¹⁸⁸ As well as the Director of the National Institute of Urban Affairs, Jagan Shah is also a committee member of the major administrative body for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (urban) – the National Advisory and Review Committee.

¹⁸⁹ For example, the Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, an NGO that is close to the government, has undertaken numerous projects in relation to toilet construction and the rehabilitation of manual scavengers. Founded in 1970 by the sociologist Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, Sulabh International is the premier organisation working on issues of sanitation and hygiene with government support. Sulabh Internationals roll out of *Sulabh Suachalayas* (‘conveniently available toilets’) as a replacement for dry latrines has been lauded as a success, with over six thousand built and approximately ten million Indians using them daily. However, the initiative has been criticised on the grounds that ‘liberated’ manual scavengers often continue to clean these toilets. The scheme leaves the caste-based occupation designation of manual scavengers/sanitation workers intact.

running water: a key fact that contributes to a lack of use and abandonment (Sagar, 2017). Equally important is investment in solid waste management – a component in the Government of India budget allocation which on the whole has been significantly lower than anticipated, as well as highly uneven across states (Deshpande and Kapur, 2018).¹⁹⁰ Taken as a whole, then, what we see is that the government has reduced the question of manual scavenging to a matter of semantics. As a result, the problem of caste and its connection to manual scavenging is largely ignored, as sanitation work is glorified, spiritualised and normalised as part of the campaign for a clean India on the basis of the Hindu chain of reasoning.

Swachh Bharat thus comprehensively fails to wash out the stain of caste-based responsibility for public sanitation from the city's urban fabric. Instead, sanitation workers are rendered the 'silent heroes' of Swachh Bharat alongside the more prominent 'public' heroes including Prime Minister Modi himself.¹⁹¹ Swachh Bharat does not entail the liberation of Dalits from chief responsibility for the sanitation of society. At best, it entails the reconfiguration of manual scavenging into the profession of urban sanitation work. The modus operandi of which, is that one group of people clean up after the majority for their livelihood. We have seen in chapter three that nationalism in Bombay/Mumbai has long been invested in the political street. Like other nationalist campaigns in the city's history, through appeal to Hindu common sense Swachh Bharat has been enjoined as national duty. The sophistication of this manoeuvre in the context of Swachh Bharat is to codify a caste-based system of sanitation, cleanliness and public hygiene as a manifestation of national duty – all citizens must contribute to the goal of a Swachh Bharat as is applicable to their allotted role in the Hindu rashtra.

¹⁹⁰ See Aggarwal (2019).

¹⁹¹ In the case of the beach clean-up campaigns there is a dark irony in the attention showered on celebrity attendees while BMC sanitation workers silently collect and handle the waste that the volunteers have collected into buckets and piles, off camera.

The 'culture of cleanliness' propagated by Swachh Bharat, then, is mediated through the political street. Bodies are disciplined on mass and the ideology of Hindutva is crystallised through everyday experiences of consumption and waste. Taking a stand against 'plastic pollution', recycling and separating waste or volunteering for an hour or two at the weekend on Mumbai's beaches is the duty of affluent upper caste Hindus. The duty of Dalit communities is to do the work seen as polluting within the Hindu social order. For certain communities, this means taking the primary responsibility for the nation's filth. For others, this means putting their litter in the bin. Swachh Bharat operates in this way as a means of articulation to mobilise and unify diverse populations – across caste distinctions – towards the common cause of a clean India. As we have seen, platitudes honouring the work of Safai Karamcharis are forthcoming within the communicative matrix of Swachh Bharat. On the ground, however, the everyday life of those tasked with cleaning the city remains much the same. With this in mind, we turn to the geography of Swachh Bharat.

The geography of Swachh Bharat

We have seen that a reconstituted form of manual scavenging remains integral to the operation of Mumbai's sanitation infrastructure in the full view of the authorities and at the instruction of the BMC. Yet, contrary to the objectives of Swachh Bharat, the rights of sanitation workers have not changed; manual scavenging has not been eradicated and the lives of sanitation workers remain much the same. During the course of this research, on route to a meeting of BMC workers in December 2019, a series of everyday problems faced by sanitation workers were pointed out to me by a local sanitary inspector. In downtown Mumbai, the density of old colonial-era buildings with newer buildings has resulted in a series of tight gullies that have been filled with refuse, excreta and waste. Raw sewage runs down the alleys and families of rats have taken residence amongst the filth. Yet these passages are expected to

be cleaned by hand. Illegal factories set up in residential buildings in the area (for example working with gold) throw acid and industrial waste onto the streets – sanitation workers have to clean it up.¹⁹² The BMC urges greater recycling but without the release of extra resources. Within a stone's throw of a BMC sanitation workers office in the area, a wooden shack serves as a recycling hub. A man sorts through huge piles of dirty plastic, food, paper and waste by hand with no protective equipment. Violations of the 2013 Act regularly go unreported, and the concerns of sanitation workers are frequently ignored, yet these workers want their voices to be heard.

The attempt to set up a newsletter published by a network of sanitation workers and activists in Mumbai corroborates this fact. The sanitation workers at the meeting are keen to tell their side of the story and inform others of their lives and struggles in the job. By publishing their newsletter, *Kaamgaar Patrika* (Workers Voice), they aim to raise issues that the mainstream newspapers and media channels neglect to report. Sanitation workers at the BMC wish to highlight the hardship and neglect they face, but more so, they wish to tell the stories of their grit and determination to strive for education and advancement.¹⁹³ Yet, curiously, many sanitation workers do not reject the caste system and their occupational designation. They want to do the work and have imbibed their role. What they do want, is to do their job with the proper protection and safety measures in place. While evidently concerned with their safety and survival, they embody a radical pragmatism. Perhaps above all, for many sanitation workers the chief concern is social acceptance and dignity in work.¹⁹⁴ They are hurt by the stigma and discrimination they face as sanitation workers. In a series of informal interviews, BMC workers explained to me that they believe what they do is important – that no one else can do it – and above all that they should be respected, not as scavengers, or

¹⁹² Field note: 14/12/19. Informal interviews with BMC workers.

¹⁹³ See appendix 2: 'Editorial', in: *Kaamgaar Patrika*. Jan 2019 Edition 1. Also see in particular, the testimony of Vijay Laxman Talekar pp. 4-5.

¹⁹⁴ Field note: 14/12/19. Informal interviews with BMC workers. See also Dubey and Nigam (2018).

“the trash guy”, but as cleaners and members of society that are critical to the functioning of the city.¹⁹⁵

As mentioned above, not all those doing the work of manual scavenging are lucky enough to find employment with the BMC. Informal sub-contracting in the city is widespread and highly dangerous. On 23rd December 2019, three manual scavengers, Vishwajeet Devnath (32), Santosh Kassekar (45) and Govind Sangram Charotiya (34), were hired by the Morya Cooperative Housing Society in Govandi, East Mumbai, to clean the complex’s septic tank. The three men passed out after descending into the manhole and inhaling toxic gases. Police and an ambulance were eventually called. However, the three men were pronounced dead on the scene and subsequently taken to Rajawadi Hospital for post-mortem. Such is the frequency of deaths in sewer lines and septic tanks that in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) alone, that this incident marked the third instance of sanitation workers being killed in the same circumstances since October 2018.¹⁹⁶ As the editors of *Kaamgaar Patrika* point out, when sanitation workers die “cleaning sewer lines, septic tanks, or sewage plants, the mainstream newspapers report it only once and briefly”.¹⁹⁷ In the event of accident or death, it is even more rare that cases are subject to the full force of the law.

Further still, the legally mandated government compensation earmarked for the families of victims of manual scavenging is rarely seen. In the absence of the authorities, activists and NGO’s pick up the slack. The aim is to gather evidence and connect the dots around what happened as quickly as possible, before the evidence is concealed. The process of investigation is difficult and convoluted.¹⁹⁸ In the case of 23rd December 2019 at Govandi, the general plan

¹⁹⁵ Field note: 14/12/19. Informal interviews with BMC workers.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with ‘Pooja’ 29/01/20, Safai Karamchari Andolan. Interview with ‘Antika’ 24.12.19, Safai Karamchari Andolan.

¹⁹⁷ [Appendix 2 Editorial, p. 2.](#)

¹⁹⁸ This account is based on my experience of accompanying SKA activists to the scene of the 2019 Govandi death case. When we arrived on the scene, the Housing Society security guard attempted to shut everything down. Some angry looking residents hovered around watching over the security

of action was to file an accurate FIR against those in the Cooperative Housing Society responsible for hiring manual scavengers to clean the septic tanks; send the correct fact-finding documentation to relevant authorities; and to seek payment for the families of the victims.¹⁹⁹ The mission of the activists involved, in this instance working with Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) is to hold the government to account and work with manual scavenging communities for social change. In the event, their main concern tends to be to sort out the payment for the families. More often than not, victims of manual scavenging leave behind a family without steady income that desperately need money to survive. As the example of the 2019 Govandi death case shows, manual scavenging in the city remains prevalent, while the rehabilitation of manual scavengers and adherence to the law remains elusive.

Elite areas of the city from Marine Drive, to Versova beach have seen significant improvements in terms of the construction of public toilets, more efficient waste management and regular garbage collection. Meanwhile, slum areas continue to experience severe neglect. Though well over half the urban population reside within them, Mumbai slums do not have regular garbage collection, many have access to neither clean water nor adequate toilets. The residences of the victims at the Morya Cooperative Housing Society are set within dense winding alleyways and gullies. Local children play in dirty unsanitary conditions as traffic booms past mere meters away along highly polluted main roads. Garbage piles up and there are no toilet blocks in sight.

guard. When pushed, the security guard admitted that it was he that saw a hand down the manhole and “called the cops”. This is all the information we are able to glean. When we went to the police station – a mere six hundred yards from the scene – the police give a family address of one of the victims. When questioned about the 2013 Act, they say they don’t know anything about it. It turns out that despite the short distance from the scene, it took the police two hours to arrive at the Housing Society. Outside of the police station we finally got some more information and a phone number and address for one of the victim’s family from a group of men sitting outside. They are the friends and neighbours of one of the victims and are there to try and get his phone, which they say has lots of contacts and numbers for his wider family that they need to get in touch with. What is remarkable is that SKA is the *only* party in an official capacity that are interested in investigating the crime.

¹⁹⁹ Regarding the 23rd December 2019 Govandi case, the request was for relevant documentation to be sent onto the Chief Minister of Maharashtra; Social Justice Minister (at State and Union level); the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis, New Delhi; and National Commission for Safai Karamcharis, Maharashtra.

Well connected citizens groups that advocate for elite areas combine to get things done and have some success in holding the authorities to account, as the poor areas of the city continue to struggle. As one of the Govandi victims' close relatives put it, in their neighbourhood, and for their community, Swachh Bharat is merely a formality.²⁰⁰ Many of the people that come from the areas that Swachh Bharat neglects clean for others in the areas where the mission has become a fixture of everyday life. They work in these areas as domestic servants and of course, as sanitation workers cleaning up the filth of the well-to-do. Simply put, while their residences are immaculate inside, the areas in which they live are severely neglected by the authorities.²⁰¹

As evidenced in the previous section of this chapter (4.2), while the BMC have money for beautification projects they fail to purchase the correct protective equipment for the sanitation workers they employ. If it is the case that everyone is doing their bit, then it is also the case that some are rewarded better than others. There is a clear distinction between who benefits from Swachh Bharat and who provides the services of Swachh Bharat. Like Gandhi, Modi cleans the feet of sanitation workers and the BMC glorifies their contribution to society in slick online videos. Meanwhile, manual scavengers continue to live in unsanitary conditions, toil and die under the cosh of systematic caste-based oppression. Platitudes are forthcoming but there is no dignity, no money and no interest from the government in manual scavengers and their rehabilitation on the ground. Instead, there is a coordinated political strategy for the production of vertical solidarity across caste lines, around the notion of an imagined political community of Hindus.

Manual scavenging, then, is both a caste and class issue. The governments secular framework of cleanliness is class-based and casteist. The ethos of

²⁰⁰ Field note: 24.12.19. Govandi death case.

²⁰¹ Beyond the fact of frequently being very proud, hospitable people, it was pointed out to me that extra care to live in hygienic conditions is made, simply because manual scavengers cannot afford to become sick, given that they are often the only people bringing money into the household. Field note: 24.12.19. Govandi death case.

Swachh Bharat – that “everyone is doing their bit” – is underpinned by a casteist mentality. Most importantly, the attempt to produce a culture of cleanliness associated with the mission fits closely with the samrasta principles outlined and propagated by the RSS. In what follows, the final section of the chapter considers Swachh Bharat in terms of the colonisation of urban public space by the narrative propaganda of Gandhian iconography.

4.4 Gandhian iconography and the colonisation of urban space

The BJP has promoted Swachh Bharat Abhiyan at any opportunity: through celebrity endorsements, giant billboards and grand pronouncements. At the same time, Modi’s image – alongside that of Mahatma Gandhi – has become synonymous with the mission to the extent that it is hard to imagine it without him (Sagar, 2017). This final section of the chapter argues that a key means of articulation for the objectives of the mission – to crystallise Hindutva ideology through a secular framework of cleanliness and sanitation – pivots on the colonisation of urban streets and public spaces by Gandhian iconography. Pinned on the notion of fulfilling Gandhi’s dream of a clean India, we see that in the last instance Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is designed to embed the primacy of Hindutva and political supremacy of the RSS-BJP into a popular wide-ranging and on-going sanitation campaign. The strategic ability to do so rests upon the propagation of master themes of discipline, cleanliness and imagined Hindu political community in connection to civic culture. The ultimate political goal of this strategy is to knit together the samrasta idea that all castes are equal, with the figure of Gandhi and narrative of creating a culture of cleanliness. The arena from which this strategy is mediated both in and through the political street.

It is a telling fact that in launching Swachh Bharat, within the first few months of coming to power, Modi chose to allude to the crude and antiquated broom as the primary tool of sanitation, as opposed to modern technological

advancements such as suction pumps and high-pressure hoses (Sagar, 2017).²⁰² Further still, by launching the mission from a Dalit residential colony he (wittingly or unwittingly) reinforced the idea that the ‘lower orders’ are unclean.²⁰³ In this regard, the symbolism of the campaign launch confirmed the stereotypes associated with sanitation work harboured by dominant caste Hindus, as the key aspect of behavioural change that would presumably be targeted. Before discussing how diverse populations are mobilised through the propaganda of Swachh Bharat/Hindu rashtra, I offer a discussion of how this strategic pivot of the mission is furthered through the saturation of the political street with Gandhian symbols and signs.

It is practically impossible to move freely about Mumbai without encountering the street-level messaging of the mission of Swachh Bharat. Infused with Gandhian iconography, the idea of a clean India as ‘Gandhi’s dream’ is strongly conveyed. This makes a lot of sense in terms of the branding of the project, Gandhi remains widely revered in India and his image and legacy is well known and admired internationally. On Gandhi’s own terms, cleanliness and sanitation were tightly intertwined with questions of morality and individual responsibility. Personal hygiene and public sanitation were seen as integral to health. And health, cleanliness, and hygiene, were directly related to themes of social order, to the extent that healthy individual bodies were seen as necessary for the production of a healthy nation (Tidrick, 2013, p. 275). Gandhi’s famous (and often repeated) claim that ‘sanitation is more important than political freedom’ rested on the idea that self-rule could only be achieved through the production of a collective sense of hygiene and cleanliness.²⁰⁴ Sanitation was thus a ‘testing ground’ for Indian preparedness

²⁰² Chandra Bhan Prasad, a Dalit activist and advisor to the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is quoted in conversation with Sagar (2017) of *The Caravan*.

²⁰³ Modi officially launched the campaign on 2nd October 2014 by wielding a broom, sweeping the ground for the television cameras and journalists alongside Dalit sanitation workers from Valmiki colony, New Delhi. From this platform he enjoined Indians to take up brooms, dustpan and dusters in order to celebrate a ‘Swachh Bharat’ on the 150-year anniversary of Gandhi’s birthday 2nd October 2019 (Sagar, 2017).

²⁰⁴ This refrain has been frequently repeated in relation to Swachh Bharat. See for instance Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Hardeep Singh Puri in 2018. See Panaji (2018).

to achieve self-rule and the ability of Indians to demonstrate a collective sense of morally principled behaviour. As he articulated the importance of the self in the context of cleanliness, Gandhi made it clear that transformation of one's self would be the necessary prerequisite for transformation of society and the nation (Joshi and Khattri, 2019, p. 213; p. 221).

Critically, Gandhi called on upper caste Hindu's to take on an element of responsibility in cleaning the streets so that cleaning, as a service in itself, might be seen in a more dignified light. He argued that the maintenance of cleanliness should not be the sole responsibility of "Untouchables". However, while Gandhi attempted to confer dignity to the role of the manual scavenger – as discussed in the previous section of the chapter (4.3) – he did little to dislodge the continued existence of the practice, while strengthening the social relations of Hindu order that render one section of society as 'Untouchable' at the same time. The 'unclean public domain' remains, 'primarily because there has been an inadequate response to the issue of untouchability' (Rodrigues, 2004, p. 119).

Gandhi's personal position on matters of cleanliness, then, was strongly moralistic as he cast himself in the role of paterfamilias of the nation. Simply put, the moralism of cleanliness was about mass mobilisation towards self-rule (Joshi and Khattri, 2019). Accordingly, Gandhian iconography in the messaging of Swachh Bharat serves a purpose: to bring people together to forge a collective sense of cleanliness around the maxim of a disciplined moral (and indeed imagined national) community. The arena is the political street. For instance, the well-designed logo of the mission emblazoned with Gandhi's spectacles joined together by the Indian tricolour flag, serves as a reminder that Swachh Bharat is backed by the moral authority of 'the Mahatma' and thus enjoins Indian citizens as a matter of patriotic duty. By connecting Swachh Bharat to the wisdom of Gandhi, the project and its stated objectives

are explicitly endorsed and legitimated by India's premier postcolonial icon (see figure 10).



Figure 10: Swachh Bharat logo draped with BJP Flag at a busy junction near Dadar rail station (photograph by the author)

In this context, Gandhi's association with the Congress has hitherto been problematic for the BJP.²⁰⁵ In this regard, the launch of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on the 150th anniversary of Gandhi's birth represents a coordinated attempt to vie for his legacy and co-opt his image: Swachh Bharat is explicitly billed by Modi and the BJP as a 'tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birthday' (see Joshua, 2014). Gandhi's image is loaded with the symbolism of the nation; his austere loincloth (*dhoti*) identifies him with the impoverished masses and his famous spectacles are symbolic of his allegedly 'moral' and 'ethical' vision of freedom. Use of Gandhi's spectacles as the primary iconography of Swachh Bharat allows the BJP to make a claim to speak for the nation as a whole, while at the same time, reminding Indians that they are 'being watched' (see Doron and Jeffery, 2018, p. 9; Jeffery, 2015, pp. 816-817). The deployment of Gandhian iconography captures the symbolic power of a man seen by many Indians as a great, internationally revered Hindu leader

²⁰⁵ Not least, as we see in the next section, owing to the fact that Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse was a member of the RSS (Jha, 2020).

and ‘father of the nation’. It also sets him up as a figure to which Modi can be compared.

Through skilful use of Gandhian iconography, then, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan propagates a powerful vision of the nation. This primary iconography saturates the political street. It is visible in murals and assorted signage, strategically placed amidst an urban landscape of pavements and street corners teeming with activity. The social space of the street – the public domain at its most concrete – is a terrain of interaction, deliberation and contention. It is also the primary arena through which Hindu social order – and by extension the Hindu rashtra – is reproduced. At the level of discourse and symbolism in urban space, the reproduction of Gandhian iconography supports a vision of cleanliness within the public sphere that is fully consonant with the rules and norms of caste society. Gandhian ideas of cleanliness are attached to the health of the individual body and under the aegis of Swachh Bharat, they are extended into the political street.

A particular case in point is Mumbai’s sprawling local rail network. With an estimated eight million people passing through it every day, the Mumbai ‘local’ is the best and cheapest way to travel distance in the city, the average journey price being just RS 10 (20p). From open till close, wave after wave of human kinetic energy ebbs and flows through the platforms according to timetable. Carriages seemingly come and go on loop. The stations, platforms, concourses and trains of the Mumbai railways combine as nodes in a network, where the hustle and jostle of the streets is intensified and speeded up. The railways connect the city and unify its otherwise disparate parts. Dense with people in search of livelihood – like the streets themselves – the railways ‘serve as a medium through which strangers or casual passers-by are able to establish latent communication with one another by recognising their mutual interests and shared sentiments’ (Bayat, 2010, p. 12). A space of individuation

and flow, competition and contemplative reflection blend into a paradoxical spatio-temporal rhythm.

Rail is the locus of Mumbai's transportation network and a place where the atomised individuals that constitute the city merge together – walking, working, sitting, loitering and watching. Large swathes of the marginalised and dispossessed, forced to live out their lives in urban public space and operate out in the open in search of subsistence and livelihood, experience the street as both primary arena of collective expression and the terrain of everyday life –neoliberal Mumbai is in this regard 'the city inside-out' (Bayat, 2010, p. 12). Though not the street itself, the rail network forms the city's connective tissue and the symbolism of Gandhi, configured into the messaging of Swachh Bharat, is invariably posted in every connecting space of the network (see figure 11). As a result, the iconography of an urbanised Gandhian spirituality, is presented as common sense to a wide cross section of Mumbaikars, as they go about their daily lives, and move in and out of the urban streets and public spaces of the city.





Figure 11: “It doesn’t require money to be neat, clean and dignified” – Swachh Bharat Abhiyan poster featuring the wisdom and iconography of Gandhi. “No spitting!” – Mural opposite the railway platform at marine lines station, South Mumbai. “Cleanliness is the only medicine to all diseases” – sign at the main concourse where the Central Railway connects with the Western line at Dadar Rail Station. Central Mumbai (photographs by the author).

Gandhian motifs, then, delineate the narrative of Swachh Bharat and open up the prospect of embedding and inculcating ideas of cleanliness, sanitation and bodily hygiene in urban space. Cleanliness, discipline and moral community become ‘national’ values, of which Hindutva is positioned as the supreme expression. Placed in this context, the message that ‘everyone is doing their bit’ appeals to discourses of bourgeois environmentalism and the praxis of Hindu social order simultaneously. Regarded from the point of view that some are better rewarded than others for keeping India clean, the iconography of Gandhi assembles together different modes of sociality and powerfully embeds them within the political logics of Hindutva. The fundamental mission of Swachh Bharat is therefore to construct what Gramsci called ‘a secular sense of unity of faith,’ between ‘a conception of the world and corresponding norm of conduct’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 326).

In Swachh Bharat, we see that a Hindu conception of the world underpinned by Hindutva values and norms of conduct, is reproduced towards the maintenance of sanitation and cleanliness in support of the goal of a ‘clean India’. In other words, through Swachh Bharat, Hindutva is reproduced in the

political street within a secular framework of cleanliness that piggybacks on the desires of Mumbaikars for a clean city, and workable solutions to the catastrophic pollution of urban society they are faced with. As we will see, in this context Hindu bodies are disciplined at the same time as bourgeois sensibilities and reconstituted practices of manual scavenging are folded into a political strategy of spatial purification. The strategy as a whole can be seen in the motif that ‘cleanliness is next to godliness’.

Cleanliness is next to godliness

The notion that ‘cleanliness is next to godliness’ can be attributed to Gandhi’s famous claim that ‘we can no more gain god’s blessings with an unclean body than with an unclean mind. A clean body cannot reside in an unclean city’ (Gandhi, 1925, p. 399). On this note, it is worth pointing out that alongside Gandhi’s personal piety and somatic concerns were a set of extreme eccentricities (Anderson, 2013; Tidrick, 2013).²⁰⁶ For instance, a peculiar admixture of interests in self-control, celibacy and dietetics were very much part of his theory of national becoming. Gandhi’s ideas about cleanliness were no different. His Hinduism was blended with Occultist and Enlightenment themes in a powerful way. The degree to which Swachh Bharat develops the idea that ‘cleanliness is next to godliness’ and marries it with the idea of a ‘science of sanitation’, is evident in one of the most popular official campaign videos of the mission.

²⁰⁶ The picture is in fact more complicated than Gandhi let on. Honed during his student days in late-Victorian London through interaction with a range of Theosophists, occultists, vegetarians and spiritualists, Gandhi’s Hinduism was rediscovered and reconfigured in light of these formative sources (Tidrick, 2013). During his time in London Gandhi met and became friends with many prominent Theosophists of the day such as Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott and Annie Besant, figures that would prove to be lasting influences on his thought. He met Blavatsky in 1889, following her move from India to London and it was at this time that he became exposed to a ‘sacralised’ idea of politics propagated by the Theosophists ‘which combined social reform with personal spiritual growth’ (Tidrick, 2013, p. 20). Furthermore, it was at this moment of his life that he first encountered his beloved *Bhagavadgītā*, in the form of Edwin Arnold’s English translation, *The Song Celestial*.

Exploiting popular attraction to the frenetic world of Indian celebrity, the 2016 ‘public service’ advert ‘Don’t Let Her Go’, starring Bollywood megastars Kangana Ranaut and Amitabh Bachchan was an instant viral hit.²⁰⁷ The plot of the ninety second clip shows various (Hindu) Indians, from householders to shopkeepers, on the one hand praying to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity and on the other, dumping their rubbish into the street. As acts of littering are committed, each individual character is shocked to see that the portraits of Lakshmi they have been praying to disappear.²⁰⁸ The clip concludes to reveal Kangana Ranaut dressed as a modern and glamorous avatar of Lakshmi, whisked away on the back of a motorbike, lotus flower and pot of gold in her hand (see figure 12). In the closing seconds of the video, the iconic voice of Amitabh Bachchan reminds the viewer that ‘cleanliness is next to godliness’. By taking a pledge, Bachchan claims that “we [can] all come together to make India a dream country; a clean country”. In turn, “as an Indian”, Kangana Ranaut pledges to “keep [her] country clean”. The government, she claims, are doing their bit through the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. She thanks the Prime Minister and calls on others to follow suit.

²⁰⁷ The advert also features a range of other popular Bollywood actors such as Isha Koppikar, Ravi Kishan & Omkar Kapoor.

²⁰⁸ In Hindu mythology early notions of *shree* (‘that which is splendid) and *Lakshmi* (good fortune) that appear in the Vedas later coalesce in the Epics into the goddess Lakshmi. Lakshmi emerges in the *Ramayana*, as a figure of radiant beauty, sitting on a lotus flower from Vishnu’s churning of the ocean of milk – a foundational act in the creation of the universe. A prominent and popular Hindu goddess, Lakshmi brings wealth, good fortune and prosperity. But she is said to be ‘fickle’, she and the blessings she brings will leave anyone that is unjust and do not deserve her presence. In contemporary times, Lakshmi holds an important place within a variety of Hindu traditions across the subcontinent and Lakshmi puja (prayers) is offered as a part of Diwali celebrations. The idea in this context, is that if one does not keep a sound practice of household conduct, Lakshmi and the good fortune she brings will desert them. See the excellent episode on the popular BBC Radio 4 podcast *In Our Time*. ‘Lakshmi’, *In Our Time*, 6 October 2016,

https://open.spotify.com/episode/292Umfv3sTh8YgKYhY1Oo2?si=oKEbVqF_R1q_BhTNk86z2w, last accessed 12 May 2020.



Figure 12: “#dontlethergo” Kangana Ranaut’s sexy and glamorous Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, turned Swachh Bharat ambassador.

This popular video is emblematic of the politics of Swachh Bharat for two reasons. First of all, in the form of Kangana Ranaut’s Lakshmi, the message of ‘Don’t Let Her Go’ – and thus, Swachh Bharat – connects cleanliness to wealth and prosperity of the individual, and in the last instance, to the prosperity of the nation, feeding into a sense of imagined political community. Second, at the same time, celebrity culture is harnessed to project consumption-based lifestyle choices as the life blood of modern India. At first glance, Don’t Let Her Go appears to neatly capture the deployment of Hindu norms and values towards the goals of Swachh Bharat. Closer reflection reveals the pivotal role of Swachh Bharat in the reproduction of Hindu social order.

As the well-known motif of Lakshmi’s role in the domestic sphere – that if one cleans their house they will be rewarded with wealth and prosperity – is shifted to the urban sphere, the Hindutva view of the world and its corresponding notion of caste Hindu based social order is articulated with reference to the political street. Don’t Let Her Go therefore connects a secular framework of cleanliness via the Hindu chain of reasoning to urban aspirations and ideas of prosperity and wealth. The implicit suggestion is that *all* space is sacred, and wealth and prosperity will be awarded to those that seek to keep it clean and pure. Through the political street, urban aspirations

in the neoliberal city are connected with the vision of the nation propagated by Hindutva. Clean urban public space is connected to wealth and prosperity. At the same time, a vision of prosperity is forwarded and underpinned with reference to the common sense of the Hindu chain of reasoning.

In the age of social media, the video has been shared millions of times and the hashtag #dontlethergo went viral. As Joseph Alter (1996, p. 314) has pointed out, Gandhi's self-orientated 'bio-morality' of health was such that the nation was to be 'reimagined one patient at a time'. The body was accordingly construed as the primary social unit of the nation:

‘the various functions in the human body have their parallel in the corporate life of society. What I have said about the inner and outer cleanliness of the individual, therefore, applies to the whole society.’²⁰⁹

For Gandhi the body was the primary site for practices of cleanliness. In the context of Swachh Bharat, a framework of cleanliness developed with reference to Gandhi's teachings and his critique of unhygienic practices is extended in an attempt to generate a sense of imagined (Hindu) political community. On the ground, the propaganda of Swachh Bharat – the language of bodily discipline, cleanliness and purity associated with Gandhian discourse – connects seamlessly with the grammar of Hindutva and the RSS strategy for a unitary Hindu India.

Yet, curiously, while Gandhi's writings on cleanliness are fully compatible with the Hindu chain of reasoning, he was an enemy of the RSS and is ultimately despised by the RSS hardcore.²¹⁰ Promotion of Gandhi's ideas of cleanliness

²⁰⁹ Vivekananda is quoted in Alter, (1996, p. 315).

²¹⁰ Gandhi was killed by RSS member Nathuram Godse. Though the RSS has claimed that Godse left the organisation in the 1930s, records prove that this was not the case and he remained an active member at the time of Gandhi's assassination (Jha, 2020). There have been several attempts to rehabilitate the image of Godse as a patriot (see Noorani, 2013). For instance, as recently as

and his image as the figurehead of a clean India is in this regard a shrewd move that allows the RSS to annihilate the elements of his legacy that they oppose. For example, his ideas on tolerance, harmony and protection of religious minorities – as opposed to open Hindu supremacy – are conveniently shifted into the background. As Gandhi becomes tightly combined with a Hindutva-friendly concept of sanitation and cleanliness, it becomes more difficult for the opposition to rehabilitate his other ideas and mobilise the image of the ‘father of the nation’ for alternative political ends in the future. The long-held near-exclusive association of Gandhi with the Congress is effectively challenged.

The standard party line trotted out by the BJP is that Swachh Bharat is “a people’s movement”. Like “Gandiji” led India to Independence, it is argued that “Modiji” has launched a popular movement to lead India to cleanliness. This is lauded as a great achievement. Recalling the epigram to this chapter, it is worth quoting the claim of BJP Union Minister for Defence, Rajnath Singh:

“Mahatma Gandhi had launched a campaign for the independence of the country, which we know as ‘Satyagraha’ movement. Now Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched a campaign of ‘Swachhta’, which is known as ‘Swachagarh’ and its success is being seen across the country”.²¹¹

The politics of Hindutva are accordingly reproduced through Swachh Bharat as Modi is placed as guide and leader of a popular people’s movement. Yet, India and its cities, even to the casual observer, remain notably unclean. I have argued in this chapter that the reason that Mumbai is so notably unclean lies

November 2019, the controversial BJP MP Pragya Thakur referred to Godse as a “Deshbhakt” (‘patriot’) in parliament after having previously done so on the 2019 election trail.

²¹¹ See ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has become people’s movement, says Rajnath’, *The Hindu*, 8 December, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/swachh-bharat-abhiyan-has-become-peoples-movement-says-rajnath/article30234087.ece>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

on the one hand, in the failure of the state to provide adequate sanitation infrastructure and on the other, on the caste-based persistence of reliance on the manual labour of Dalits and the lower-castes to clean the city for everyone else. If the BJP's visions of Swachh Bharat is taken seriously, it must be accepted that it is the ultimate responsibility of the Dalit manual scavenger to maintain cleanliness and clean up waste and filth in the civic realm (Teltumbde, 2018, pp. 320-321). What we see is that Swachh Bharat reconfigures caste-based social relations in order to reinforce them and does so from a position of moral and political leadership. The cleverness of the propaganda of Swachh Bharat has been to easily slot this discourse together with the desires of Mumbaikars for the beautification of the city and better management of urban space.

We have seen in the first section of this chapter (4.2) that citizens movements place cleanliness and hygiene in a particular urban context, where waste and material debris are categorised as problems of individual responsibility to be solved by collective litter picking the city's beaches and beauty spots. Meanwhile, there is little to no recognition in the propaganda of Swachh Bharat of the issue of caste hierarchy driving the reproduction of filth in the city. The objective to eliminate manual scavenging set out in the literature of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (urban) has not been taken seriously (4.3). In this context, the exploitation of labouring Dalits is invisibilised within the praxis of Swachh Bharat. This final section of the chapter (4.4) has shown that as Gandhi is set up as a 'meme' for the nation that means all things to all people, Swachh Bharat doubles up as a Hindutva-friendly 'means of articulation' to mobilise diverse populations. Meanwhile, through the colonisation of urban space, Gandhi's image and legacy are appropriated by the Sangh to the political detriment of the Congress.

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the primary motivations of Swachh Bharat are twofold: the better management of urban space and reinforcement of Hindu social order. Through the praxis of Swachh Bharat, the motif that cleanliness is next to godliness connects the Hindu chain of reasoning to a secular framework of cleanliness that is mediated through the political street. By way of a discussion of the beach clean-up movement in Mumbai, it was argued that the praxis of Swachh Bharat connects with popular bourgeois environmentalist practices, wants, needs and desires for a beautified city. At the same time, Swachh Bharat disseminates the samrasta narrative that everyone is doing their bit. Here manual scavenging is not seen as a problem to be solved. Instead, sanitation workers are ultimately treated as a resource to be exploited – beyond superficial appraisal, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has failed to change their status. Further still, it was shown that the geography of Swachh Bharat is highly uneven. Despite the lauded successes of the mission, Mumbai remains a city where elite areas have become relatively clean and are increasingly connected to sanitation infrastructures, while slum areas continue to experience severe neglect at the hands of the state.

The BMC spends money on beautification projects but has no money – or rather, political will – to improve the conditions of BMC workers. Meanwhile, sanitation workers that come from the outer limits and slum areas of the city – employed both formally and informally – are employed to clean the filth of those that reside in up-market areas. Informally contracted labourers that are employed to manually clean toilets and/or sewers and septic tanks, while doing the work of manual scavengers, are not considered as such by the authorities or within the official literature. Instead of a coordinated attempt to eliminate manual scavenging, the government pushes a narrative that glorifies the work of sanitation workers. At the same time, it fails to condemn the humiliating and dangerous working practices that shape their everyday lives. While there has been considerable investment in toilet and construction and solid waste management, these efforts have been stunted by the casteist

nature of Swachh Bharat (see Coffey and Spears, 2017; Doron and Jeffery, 2018). Instead, the energies of the BJP have focused on the mass production of narrative propaganda towards the performance of the Hindu nation in the street.

The final section of the chapter fleshed out what I take to be the major objective powering Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: mass communication, political messaging and the Gandhian branding of the mission. Here it was argued that ultimately, the terrain of Swachh Bharat is the political street. The political ideology of Hindutva becomes crystallised in and through urban public space as bourgeois environmentalism and Dalit sacrifice are metabolised into a Gandhian narrative of cleanliness and community participation.

Consequently, Swachh Bharat reveals a coordinated political strategy that offers a (fictional) path to a 'clean India' modelled on harmony between castes. In the last instance, then, the mission is more about political mobilisation towards the production of imagined political community, than it is about 'development' and sanitation. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan draws energy from the catastrophic pollution of urban society and offers its regeneration through spatial purification. By piggy backing on the overwhelming desires of Mumbaikars for a clean city, the mission serves as a means of articulation for the crystallisation of Hindutva. The links between consumption-based lifestyle choices, caste hierarchy and Hindutva in neoliberal Mumbai are therefore complex but real. In the next chapter, I locate the politics of Hindutva and performance of the nation in the street in the International Day of Yoga.

Chapter five

International Day of Yoga: the street politics of spectacle

‘By self-development with the help of yoga each morning, we will be dedicated to the progress and prosperity of the nation the entire day.’

- **Baba Ramdev (2009)²¹²**

‘Up, India, and conquer the world with your spirituality. Spirituality must conquer the West.’

- **Swami Vivekananda, (1960 [1897])²¹³**

5.1 Introduction

Inauguration of the United Nations International Day of Yoga has been presented by the BJP as legitimate proof that India is the historical and spiritual home of yoga. In a short space of time, yoga has been transformed from an obscure practice to a multibillion-dollar industry. As yoga has become a valuable global commodity, studios do business in practically every major city and town on the planet (see **Thurston and Bloyce, 2020**). In a world seemingly devoid of meaning, there appears to be an increasing desire for ancient wisdom and knowledge of authentic pasts. An integrated practice of wellness and wellbeing, yoga postures (āsana) and breathing (prāṇāyāma) have become fully integrated into the ‘matrix of 21st century self-care and globalised fitness branding and marketing’ (**Alter, 2004, p. 73**). Yet, despite yoga’s global reach within this matrix, India remains the global centre for teacher training and yoga tourism. In this context, the global popularity of yoga has become a source of great pride for many Indians.

Pride in yoga dovetails with Indian desires to gain recognition and respect from the world at large, especially the Anglosphere. On the back of the global

²¹² Ramdev is quoted in **Sarbacker (2014, p. 362)**

²¹³ Vivekananda is quoted in Thomas **Blom Hansen (1999, p. 69)**.

commodification of yoga, the BJP is keen to make use of the potential of yoga as an instrument of Indian soft power on the world stage. According to Narendra Modi, yoga is India's gift to the world. It "is not just about exercise [but] is a way to discover oneness with yourself, the world and nature."²¹⁴ In India and around the world, the International Day of Yoga has emerged as an annual mass gathering of choreographed bodies, breathing and moving in concert in urban public space.

In this chapter I build on the argument of chapter four to claim that in the same way as Swachh Bharat, what the BJP are doing with the promotion of yoga, is generating a sense of Hindu nationalism via the production of imagined community. The idea of 'Eastern' Indian spirituality in opposition to the materialism of 'the West' is employed to demarcate difference through spectacle and mobilise the diverse population of India in the face of neoliberal globalisation.²¹⁵ Yoga, according to the Sangh, is a pertinent vehicle to achieve this aim. Through the International Day of Yoga as mass street level spectacle, Hindutva forces promote yoga practice to fire up nostalgia for an imagined glorious past and thorough the mobilisation of 'yoga bodies' in the political street, reinforce Hindutva values as universal and supreme, at the same time situating India 'in the world'. I claim that the International Day of Yoga in the political street represents a colonisation of urban public space by Hindutva. As the nation is performed in the street, Hinduism is framed as a world-dynamic force and the 'yogic way of life' is positioned as a passage to the restoration of Hindu national pride.

The political strategy towards this end is to connect contemporary desires for self-care with the production of a patriotic Hindutva ethos around the achievements and benefits of yoga as an indigenous system of health and wellness. By according a prominent place to the 'yogic body' in its philosophy

²¹⁴ For Modi's speech to the United Nations see United Nations. 2020. International Day of Yoga 21 June, UN.org, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/yoga-day>, last accessed 1 October 2020.

²¹⁵ See for example, Longkumer (2018) on the promotion of yoga by Baba Ramdev in Nagaland.

of action, the International Day of Yoga has been modelled to generate a sense of imagined political community in celebration of the Hindu rashtra. I make these claims in relation to the increasingly standardised, nationalistic yoga of Hindutva (5.2). Building on this argument, in the next section of the chapter (5.3), I discuss the 2019 International Day of Yoga in Mumbai and the promotion of yoga by Narendra Modi with special reference to digital media strategy. Finally, I move on to discuss the concept of Hinduism as a ‘world-dynamic’ force and its role in the production of an imagined community of Hindus in relation to the International Day of Yoga (5.4).

5.2 Hindutva and the standardisation of yoga

Derived from the Sanskrit root word ‘yuj’, yoga combines the notions to ‘yoke’ and ‘union’ to refer to the practice of ‘aiming towards an extraordinary state of consciousness, usually defined as the ultimate union with the divine’ (Godrej, 2016, p. 774). The foundational text of classical yoga philosophy, the *Yoga Sutras* of Patañjali was compiled somewhere between the first century BCE and fourth century CE. The Sutras are grounded in sāmkhya philosophy, a materialist and decidedly non-theistic school of thought, that regards the universe as consisting of dual elements of *prakriti* (matter) and *purusha* (consciousness).²¹⁶ The idea of God and concept of higher power came much later. Theism was introduced into yoga philosophy through the *Srimad Bhagwad Gita* (assembled between the forth and second century BCE) in the form of the Vedānta school of ‘Hindu’ philosophy (Bartley, 2019). The contemporary popular model of yoga that places a religiously inspired vision of God at the centre, comes from this point of inflection, albeit drawing heavily from the ‘neo-Vedanta’ of Swami Vivekananda (Johar, 2015).²¹⁷ From this lineage, the problematic claim of yoga as ‘Hindu’ arises.

²¹⁶ See ‘LG35 – Karen O’Brien-Kop -Purusha and Prakriti’, *Lonely Guru Podcast*, 20 November 2016, <http://www.trueryan.com/lonelyguru/>, last accessed 24 May 2020.

²¹⁷ The late-colonial association of yoga with Hinduism is tied to the formation of modern Vedānta philosophy and the formation of the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal, 1828. In this context it is important to note that the nexus of Hinduism and yoga was mediated through the colonial encounter. With the real

In what follows, I take a contrary position and argue that yoga has never existed as a ‘fixed primordial entity’ and neither is it representative of a pristine Vedic lineage (Alter, 2004, p. 4). Rooted in late-colonial themes, its ‘origins’ are highly syncretic and eclectic in form.²¹⁸ The contemporary politicisation of yoga is rooted in the late-colonial history of Indian nationalism, eugenics and race as opposed to some form of pristine cultural tradition of Vedic Hinduism, as is claimed by Hindutva ideologues. This section of the chapter unfolds in two parts. First, I focus on the standardisation of yoga around Hindutva values at the all-India level of the Indian Yoga Association (IYA) and second, I discuss the nexus of Hindutva, yoga and its standardisation, with special reference to The Yoga Institute at Santa Cruz in Mumbai, a famous yoga school with close relations to the Sangh Parivar.

Founded by the renowned yoga guru B.K.S Iyengar in 1980, the IYA is a self-regulating body and presents itself as India’s leading yoga association. Core functions of the association include the provision of facilities for research into yoga, organisation of seminars and conferences, granting of accreditation to

technological and perceived cultural superiority of the British colonisers – and Christian missions in the region – a deep sense of disillusionment developed within elite intellectual circles of the Bengali Brahmin community. The presence of Christianity pushed the community to engage in a period of prolonged soul searching, regarding the nature and form of their own religious doctrine and practice. Reflecting on the culture of the missionaries in their midst, Christianity was identified as universally open to all genders, cultures and people of all social status. Hinduism was, on the contrary, fragmented and racked with divisions. The Hindu caste system allowed only those of the twice born varnas to participate in the orthodox Vedic religion. Further still, the Brahmin community lamented that while missionaries were able to draw on the New Testament to propagate their message in neatly bound copies, the vast literature of the Vedas could not be distilled into one easily reproducible book. In response, a series of reforms were suggested. For instance, the extraction of the *Bhagavadgītā* from the *Mahābhārata* to mirror the use of the New Testament by Christian missionaries (Bartley, 2019, p. 2). Alongside the production of a reformist ‘monotheistic’ Hinduism, the Brahmo Samaj sought to set the philosophy of yoga as a cornerstone of Indian ‘national’ culture. And so, the Brahmo Samaj brought a universal vision of God into view within a reformed Hinduism. Most critically, the Brahmo Samaj introduced the belief in and worship of *brahman* – ‘the Eternal Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the author and preserver of the universe’ (Bartley, 2019, p. 5). The bond between Hinduism and yoga was carried forth to the masses especially through the work of the Brahmo Samaj’s most famous son, Swami Vivekananda – the primary figure responsible for casting yoga as the inner kernel of Indian (read: Hindu) spirituality (Van der Veer, 2001, p. 73).

²¹⁸ While certainly ‘culturally South Asian’ the story of the late-nineteenth century ‘yoga renaissance’ is intimately connected to the global political currents of the late-colonial era in British India (Jain, 2015, p. 18). The colonial-modern revival of interest in yoga ‘was born of symbiotic relations between modern Vedāntic philosophy, Western occultism, the politics of nationalism, and, in the case of modern postural yoga, systems of modern physical culture’ (De Michelis, 2008, p. 20).

institutions and facilitation of yoga classes and teacher training. At the centre of the IYA's operational remit is the oversight of yoga teacher training and instruction in line with the Yoga Certification Board (YCB) and 'Voluntary Certification of Yoga Professionals' launched by the Ministry of AYUSH in 2016.²¹⁹ Since the rise of Narendra Modi and following his championing of the 'yogic way of life', the IYA has been somewhat rejuvenated. According to the Association's website the driving force of the IYA's mission is "acceptance of responsibility" in relation to Modi's call to spread the message of yoga. The stated aim of the association is to make "the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister into a reality."²²⁰

Hindutva's offensive into the world of yoga connects the political domain to the institutionalisation of yoga practice. The IYA has a role in policy making: many of its most prominent members sit on government committees that concern themselves with the promotion and development of yoga. At first glance, the association appears diverse in terms of membership and representation. For example, a number of different lineages of yoga are represented in the makeup of the IYA board membership, from the tradition of yoga for 'householders' represented by Senior Vice President Hansaji Yogendra, Director of The Yoga Institute in Mumbai, to the yoga philosophy of Governing Council member Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji, founder of the 'Art of Living Foundation', a self-described NGO offering stress alleviation and self-development programs based on yogic principles. Unsurprisingly, in this context, the primary objective of the IYA is listed as "maintaining and promoting the different Indian Yoga traditions".²²¹ Yet, this claim is immediately undermined by the high degree of political influence exercised

²¹⁹ The YCB is functionally autonomous and operates under the aegis of the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga based in New Delhi. The National Institute acts as the coordinating agency for research, development and promotion of yoga in India.

²²⁰ See: 'About us', *yogaiya.in*, <http://www.yogaiya.in/iya/about-us>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

²²¹ See: 'About- Indian Yoga Association', *yogaiya.in*, <http://www.yogaiya.in/about/>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

across the two levels of oversight. The political cohesion that connects the heads of the Executive Council and Governing Council is striking.

The current President of the Executive Council is Dr H.R Nagendra, who took over in early 2018 from Secretary General of Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute, Shri O.P Tiwari ji. Nagendra's yoga career officially began in 1975, when he joined the RSS-founded Vivekananda Kendra as a full-time worker and yoga educator.²²² The Vivekananda Kendra was founded in 1973 when RSS worker Eknath Ranade was personally selected by then RSS head, M.S 'Guruji' Golwalkar, to organise and coordinate the centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's birth (Beckerlegge, 2014, p. 329). Vivekananda Kendra is a self-described "spiritually orientated service mission" influenced by the praxis of Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, but also by the organisational strategies and politics of the RSS. The focus of their activities is the promotion of the 'yoga way of life'. As Dr Nagendra moved up through the organisation, he became involved in devising yoga education and yoga therapy training for the Kendra's cadre. Through this cadre, the Kendra's yoga outreach program is disseminated at the community level, through social work based out of its various branches, and through various yoga camps, festivals and health drives (Beckerlegge, 2014, pp. 338-339). Though still closely associated with the Kendra, Nagendra now serves as president of the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (SVYAS) in Bengaluru and as Chancellor of SVYAS Yoga University. Nagendra is one of the most preeminent promoters and gurus of yoga within RSS circles.

He is most famous, however, for his role as personal yoga guru to Narendra Modi, and as a leading figure in the push for establishing an International Day of Yoga. The Prime Minister has long claimed to be inspired by Swami Vivekananda's blend of Hindu spiritualism and national resurgence, at one

²²² Nagendra is a former mechanical engineer that worked for NASA and Harvard University in the United States.

point (unsuccessfully) applying to become a monk in the Ramakrishna Mission (see Dasgupta, 2019).²²³ In an article published in the RSS newspaper *Organiser*, Nagendra reveals that he has been working with Modi since 1987. He points out that the government's setting up of the YCB aims to bring uniformity to yoga courses both in India and globally. He further claims that both the International Day of Yoga and 'the protocol' will 'bring the right direction' to the trend in the West of promoting yoga āsana practice in separation from 'yogic principles'. He laments that the separation of yoga from its Hindu/Vedic origins 'is like disconnecting [a] tree from its roots, and emphatically states that 'yoga is a revolution in the making to bring health, harmony, peace, etc. across the globe'.²²⁴ Modi's trust in Nagendra and the new-found prominence of the IYA and its mission shows in the leading role the Association played in coordinating and designing the 'ideal module' for the inaugural International Day of Yoga celebrations in 2015 (see figure 13).²²⁵



Figure 13: The inaugural International Day of Yoga celebrations, 21st June 2015, New Delhi. On Narendra Modi's left sits Dr Nagendra. To Modi's far right is Hansaji Yogendra next to Baba Ramdev in saffron robes. In the last instance, the format and

²²³ In the end, Modi was rejected and continued his career in the RSS before being parachuted into the upper echelons of the BJP as Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2002.

²²⁴ See 'Yoga is a revolution in the making to bring health, harmony, peace, etc. across the globe': Dr HR Nagendra, Yoga Consultant to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, *Organiser*, 20 June 2019, <https://www.organiser.org/Encyc/2019/6/20/Yoga-is-a-revolution-in-the-making-Dr-HR-Nagendra.html>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

²²⁵ See 'Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of Executive Council of The Indian Yoga Association Held on 12th Feb 2015', Indian Yoga Association, <http://www.yogaiya.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/6th-meeting-of-ec.pdf>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

presentation of the flagship International Day of Yoga was entrusted to the leadership of the IYA.

The tightening grip of Hindutva forces over an increasingly centralised and standardised yoga is further evidenced in the significant reorganisation of the IYA during the course of February 2017. In terms of administration, the former Advisory Board was renamed as the Governing Council. The new Governing Council was then earmarked to become ‘the supreme body for policy and decision making’, with the Executive Council responsible for the execution of its decisions.²²⁶ What is significant here is that the unanimously nominated Chairman of the new Governing Council was another close confidant of the Prime Minister, yoga guru and celebrity business mogul Baba Ramdev.²²⁷ Under the official name Yogrishi Swami Ramdev Ji, ‘Swami’, or ‘Baba’ Ramdev, found fame as a talented and charismatic yoga teacher and godman in a televangelist mode on Indian morning television in the early 2000s.²²⁸ At present, expertly conjoining worlds of religion, business and politics, Ramdev moves seamlessly from television studios to preside over mass yoga camps (*yog shivir*), mingling with the rich and powerful yet seemingly accessible to ordinary Indians. He is without doubt, the most recognisable face of Indian yoga in the twenty first century.

Baba Ramdev is simultaneously the most influential yoga teacher in India, a mega-celebrity with global reach, and one of the most vocal cheerleaders for

²²⁶ See ‘Minutes of the Second (Special) Meeting of the General Body of the Indian Yoga Association Held on 8th March, 2017’, Indian Yoga Association, http://www.yogaiya.in/gb_moms/, last accessed 12 May 2020.

²²⁷ Born Ramakrishna Yadav in a small village in Haryana, the young Yadav is said to have begun the study of Sanskrit and yoga at 14 years old. While not much is known about Ramdev’s early life, what is important regarding his backstory, is the carefully honed projection that he has lived the life of a Hindu ascetic since childhood.

²²⁸ Ramdev’s morning show proved a massive hit and with his business partner Balkrishna Subedi, Ramdev went on to buy the channel. From this point on, he gained a mass following, holding huge outdoor yoga camps (*yog shivir*) across India and teaching yoga to popular celebrities. Additionally, he has become extremely influential in his role as billion-dollar co-owner with Balkrishna of Patanjali Ayurved Ltd, India’s fastest growing FMCG company. Patanjali produces Ayurveda products aimed at the ‘Hindu consumer’ and cultivates a strong “Make in India” swadeshi message. Ramdev’s image has become synonymous with Ayurveda and yoga through slick advertising campaigns and the use of his image to market Patanjali’s wide range of commodities.

Narendra Modi across the Indian media landscape. Crucially, his politics have long been sympathetic to and fully compatible with the politics of the Sangh (Jaffrelot, 2011).²²⁹ From the days when he had not yet emerged as one of India's most recognisable faces, Ramdev's yoga teachings have disseminated a clear message of duty towards the nation.²³⁰ For instance, within perhaps the key medium of his communication – television – Ramdev spreads yoga practice as televised spectacle as he ruminates on yoga philosophy and applies āsana and prānāyāma to the details and problems of everyday life. During his performances, the audience are treated to charismatic instruction in basic mantra performance, including the chanting of *om*, popular Vedic (Hindu) mantras and basic meditation techniques (Sarbacker, 2014, p.356). The real innovation of Ramdev's practice is that it is remarkably straightforward. Postures are simplified so that practically anyone can do them, and individual poses are designated as treatment for specific diseases. Yoga is framed simultaneously as a religious pursuit and as a rigorous methodology to improve one's health (Crair, 2018). At the same time, yoga is rendered as a political and nationalist act. Critically, for Baba Ramdev, yoga is at the absolute core of the struggle for national awakening, of which there is no higher duty. As he explains:

‘after self-development with the help of yoga each morning
I want to fill myself with energy so as to help the nations
development. After self-awakening with the help of yoga, I
want to take ahead the holy mission of national
awakening. The question arises in a number of people's

²²⁹ Despite protestation to the contrary, as Christophe Jaffrelot (2011) points out, Ramdev has long been backed by the Sangh Parivar and has been involved with the Sangh for at least the same period of time. For more than half a decade prior to 2011, the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser* had enthusiastically backed his actions.

²³⁰ Ramdev's first openly 'political' move was in 2011, when he rode the wave of the rising national anti-corruption movement. After announcing that he would go on hunger strike unless the Congress government beefed up anti-corruption laws, Ramdev led a 60,000-strong rally at Delhi that was later violently broken up by the police. In the end, Ramdev attempted to escape disguised as a woman but was eventually arrested. The BJP were among the first to support him and condemn the police action as 'anti-democratic'.

minds about the relationship between yoga and the nation's progress. So, I want to make it clear that without self-progress, the nation's progress is impossible. Hence, by self-development with the help of yoga each morning, we will be dedicated to the progress and prosperity of the nation the entire day. Yoga and nationalism are not two different philosophies but are two sides of the same coin!

(Ramdev, 2009, pp. 13-14).

Through propagation of a 'scientific Vedic paradigm' and yogic regimen of health and wellness, for Baba Ramdev, restoration of the body is connected to restoration of the health of the nation (Gupta and Copeman, 2019). At the same time, the nexus of yoga and nationalism also has a flip side: 'those who do not love the soil, culture, civilization, and the people of the nation have no right to stay in this country' (Ramdev, 2009, p. 16). Ramdev's mission to shape and discipline the national body through yoga is repeatedly buttressed with 'Hindu' cultural references, including invocations of Krishna, Ram and various parables and idioms of the *Ramayāna* and *Mahābhārata*' (Chakraborty, 2006, p. 389). Within Ramdev's vision of the Hindu nation is the conviction that ninety nine percent of Indian Muslims were converted. Speaking on the Ram Janmabhoomi issue, he has even gone as far as to claim that Lord Ram is a revered figure for Indian Muslims. Accordingly, the matter of building the Ram temple at the former site of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya should be viewed "from [a] perspective of national unity".²³¹ In this context, Ramdev's physical, spiritual and *political* regimen is intimately tied to Hindutva visions of the nation.

²³¹ India Today. 2019. 'Exclusive: Lord Ram revered by Muslims too, 99% Muslims in India are converted, says Ramdev'. *India Today*. 16 November 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/99-muslims-in-india-are-converted-ramdev-1619625-2019-11-16>, last accessed 20 September 2020.

In the Indian Yoga Association, then, the Sangh Parivar has built an institution – manned by the leading lights of Indian yoga – to align the ‘yogic way of life’ with the political goals of Hindutva. Indeed, the extent of the ambition of the IYA is revealed in the minutes of the 18th April 2018 General Council meeting, where Chairman Ramdev voiced the concern that until the IYA has a legal identity, it will not be able to bring any fundamental change in the world of yoga. It was noted that currently the IYA is a private body unlike legal entities such as the Bar Council of India and Medical Council of India. President Nagendra supported this concern and it was resolved that a letter of request on the matter would be delivered personally by the Nagendra to the Prime Minister.²³² According to the mission statement on their website, it is the mission of the IYA to “bring together all institutes of Yoga under one umbrella who are committed to promotion and advancement of Yoga and its application across the world.”²³³ We have seen that behind the stated aim to maintain and promote ‘different’ traditions of yoga is a more powerful drive to standardise otherwise relatively disparate lineages under the umbrella of the Sangh. Let us turn to a discussion of what this looks like on the ground in Mumbai, with reference to the praxis of The Yoga Institute, at Santa Cruz.²³⁴

‘Householder’ yoga in the city

A once relatively apolitical institute researching and teaching ‘householder’ yoga to affluent upper caste Bombay citizens; in the Modi era, the Yoga Institute at Santa Cruz has become closely involved in the promotion and teaching of a nationalistic program of yoga education. This move in a more political direction emanated in large part from the emergence of Director

²³² See ‘Minutes of the Second Meeting of Governing Council of the Indian Yoga Association Held on 29th April 2018’, Indian Yoga Association, <http://www.yogaiya.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/minutes-of-meeting-29th-april-2018.pdf>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

²³³ See ‘About - Indian Yoga Association’, *yogaiya.in*, <http://www.yogaiya.in/about/>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

²³⁴ The following account draws in large part on participation in The Yoga Institutes seven days Introduction to the ‘Yoga Way of life course’ conducted in English. Out of fifty participants in the seven-day camp (including myself) forty-seven were Indian.

Hansa Yogendra and the promotion of her son Hrishi Yogendra to Vice-Director and lead in business operations, following the death of father of the family, previous Director Jayadeva Yogendra in 2018.²³⁵ “Hansaji”, as she is affectionately known, is styled as the “First Lady of Yoga” and much is made at the Institute of her appearance at the inaugural 2015 International Day of Yoga alongside the Prime Minister, Baba Ramdev, Dr Nagendra and Shri Shri Ravi Shankar (see figure 12). As mentioned above, Hansaji is the Vice-President of the IYA. The Yoga Institute was the first centre for yoga education to be certified by the ministry of AYUSH to teach and accredit students. In 2018, the Institute was awarded the prestigious Prime Minister’s Award for Outstanding Contribution for Promotion and Development of Yoga, further enhancing The Yoga Institutes nation-wide reputation for excellence in yoga education.

Yet, The Yoga Institute has not always been this way inclined. Notably, while many credit Swami Vivekananda as ‘the creator of fully fledged modern yoga’ (De Michelis, 2004, p. 90), others point to the prominent role of ‘less known figures such as [founder of the Yoga Institute] Shri Yogendra, who [instead] explicitly linked Yoga to health and fitness’ (Alter, 2004, pp. 27-28).²³⁶

Manibhai Haribhai Desai, who would later take the name Shri Yogendra, connected yoga with physical culture and rebranded its practice as scientific physical exercise. Yogendra’s mission was to research and design a curative yoga therapy for affluent, upper caste Bombay society. He was heavily influenced by European trends in physical culture and at the centre of the popularisation of yoga as the ‘science and art of living’ in the city (Yogendra, 1997, p. 24). In a nutshell, Yogendra’s approach was to define yoga in relation to science, medicine and physical fitness via questions of religion, education

²³⁵ Interviews with ‘Virat’ and ‘Sachin’ at The Yoga Institute, 27/12/19.

²³⁶ Other figures influential in the formation of postural yoga in the same period include gurus such as Swami Kuvalayananda (Pune district, Maharashtra) and Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (Mysore, Karnataka).

and psychology.²³⁷ Although not immune to claiming that his approach was based in the preservation of ‘ancient’ yogic traditions, and harbouring a keen interest in late-colonial racial science,²³⁸ Yogendra was relatively clear that his practice aimed at the ‘modification of *āsana* and *prānāyāma* into the rubric of therapy and rhythmic exercise’ (Alter, 2014, p. 73).

Change is certainly afoot at The Yoga Institute, but not in all areas. For instance, the demographic remains firmly upper caste householders:²³⁹ Hindi and English are spoken interchangeably by most and a significant amount of the courses offered at the Institute are conducted in English. The Yoga Institute is a hive of activity. There are consistently overlapping Ministry of AYUSH certified Teacher Training courses going on that vary in length, from the one-month course to the three-month, seven months, one and two-year courses. Various health camps, half-day camps and the popular “21 Days Better Living Course” operate daily, in addition to multiple daily regular classes. Monday to Saturday from 6.00am to 8.00pm the campus is buzzing and on an average day, hundreds of people move in and through The Institutes studios. While education in yoga *āsana* remains an important part of the programmes offered, the ethos of instruction centres upon an explicit

²³⁷ As Suzanne Newcombe (2017, p. 11) notes, ‘perhaps one of Yogendra’s lasting legacies was the normalisation of a secularised Yoga, primarily addressing the physical complaints of Indian householders, including women, while also referencing Patñjali’s Yoga Sūtra as the basis of this approach to Yoga.’

²³⁸ The significance of Yogendra’s practice is that it blended concerns with mental and moral hygiene with a strong emphasis on the cultivation of the physical body. In particular, Yogendra held a special interest in the potential for racial self-improvement through yoga. That is, an interest in the interconnection between physical education and yoga and the possibilities it held for what he called ‘yoga eugenicism’ (Singleton, 2007, p. 135). In short, Yogendra (1997, p. 42) was of the opinion that ‘unless conscious and purposive physical education is applied, the individual and therefore the race is likely to suffer from the consequences of gradual deterioration’. Physical inheritance could be improved through yoga eugenics, not just for the individual, but ‘for the benefit of posterity’ (Yogendra, 1997, p. 43). For Yogendra, then, the aim of yoga physical education was not the ‘bestial urge’ to ‘bulging muscles and robust physique’, but rather, ‘physiological soundness – pure radiant health conducive to immunity against disease and the promotion of longevity’ (Yogendra, 1997, p. 44). Yoga was the answer to physical decadence and a roadmap for inter-generational uplift. As Alter (2014, p. 63) notes, ‘Yogendra’s eclectic, idiosyncratic, and holistic philosophy of evolutionary self-development based on rhythmic exercises proved to be a message with specific gravity’.

²³⁹ When those at The Yoga Institute talk about the ‘householder’ what they mean is ‘middle class’ professionals. A simple glance at the price list of classes, courses and programmes demonstrates that in a city where (officially) around 55% live in informal ‘slum’ settlements, the city’s urban poor are effectively priced out.

pushback against the idea of yoga as simply postural practice. According to the Institute's contemporary teachings, the purpose of yoga āsana is to bring the mind steady, through execution of rhythmic breathing (prāṇāyāma).²⁴⁰ In the mission to bring yoga to the householder and make the 'yogic way of life' widely accessible, the target is training of the mind, as opposed to an aesthetics of bodily fitness. The 'yogic way of life' thus centres on the practice of prāṇāyāma, kiryas (cleansing practices), āsana, and as we will see, a range of self-help techniques and 'attitude training'. What has shifted at The Yoga Institute can be summarised as a tilt towards a 'neo-Hindu' orientation to yoga therapy, alongside the traditional psycho-somatic approach developed by Sri Yogendra in the 1920s (see De Michalis, 2004).

Sunday mornings at the Institute host the weekly "Satsang" between 9.30 and 10.30am, consisting of a lecture followed by Q&A hosted by Hansaji that is free, open to the public and gathers large crowds. According to the Institutes brochure: "in Sanskrit 'sat' means 'truth' and 'sang' means together". The aim of the "interactive session" is to "try to understand the meaning and reality of life based on the various topics related to Yoga and well-being." These lectures offer a platform for dissemination of the core teachings and philosophy of the Institute. For example, the topic for the 29th December 2019 Satsang is "The Concept of Duty." The prelude to Hansaji's lecture is a skit performed by young students from the teacher training programs that highlights the necessity of doing ones' duty over indulgence in social media, consumption and smart phone-mediated reality. There are two families in the skit. One is detached and faces daily problems and arguments and the other is harmonious, loving and regularly read the *Bhagavadgītā*. The latter are consequently able to fulfil their "duty" while the former struggle along. In the final scene, it turns out that both fathers of each family are in the Indian Army and when they get called up to serve, only the father from the pious and harmonious family unit is able to properly do his duty for the nation. The final

²⁴⁰ Interview: Hansaji Yogendra at The Yoga Institute, 13/01/20.

message is narrated: “India is the motherland and [our] duty is towards the nation”. In her subsequent lecture, Hansaji explains that only by doing our duty can we maintain health and gain wealth and prosperity. The hierarchy of one’s duties is explained as first of all, to one’s self, second, to our family, third, towards society and forth, to the nation.²⁴¹

The centrality of one’s ‘responsibility in life’ within the teachings of The Yoga Institute is primarily elaborated through the concept of ‘Karma Yoga’. The principle that actions in life should be performed according to the concept of duty, Karma Yoga is both a regular session at The Yoga Institute and a concept that pervades the various “better living” programs and workshops that the Institute offers. It teaches that what is needed for change in one’s life, boils down to the application of three principles: duty, dedication and devotion. Things must be done on the basis of duty, as opposed to desire and dedication must be practiced and applied to one’s daily actions. The principle of devotion holds that if one does not have faith in a higher reality, application of the first two principles will not be possible. Devotion keeps one grounded. One’s relationship with divinity/higher power is therefore the most important relationship in life. Without it, the Karma Yoga sessions reiterate, “your life will be shaky. If you keep this relationship to a higher power dear you will prosper and gain peace of mind”.²⁴² The good Karma Yogi, in short, is in touch with their being-in-the-world and this guides everything they do.²⁴³

While the format of Karma Yoga in this mode appears to be plucked more from the “12-step” tradition of self-help²⁴⁴ than the Vedas, the concept is infused by a Hindu idiom and duty is explicitly related to the Hindu concept of Dharma.²⁴⁵ The overriding message of Karma Yoga is belief in the self, to “do

²⁴¹ Field note: 29/12/19. Satsang at The Yoga Institute.

²⁴² Field note: 1/1/20. Karma yoga session.

²⁴³ Field note: 2/1/20. Karma yoga session.

²⁴⁴ See for example Brand (2017).

²⁴⁵ Dharma has a range of meanings in South Asian religions. At the Yoga Institute it was equated with personal duty and the correct moral way of living in accordance with one’s place in the universe. The concept was frequently discussed with reference to Arjuna’s duty according to the *Ramayana*

your duty” and “avoid being a flag without a pole”. Multiple references in the Karma Yoga sessions are made to the *Bhagavadgītā* and the story of Krishna and Arjuna. The necessity of righteous war is articulated as the corner stone of Dharmic duty. Like Arjuna’s duty in the *Ramayana*, Karma Yoga is about being committed to one’s “role”. This ethic is duly extended to the modern world of work, where it is claimed that “even if you are working in an organisation for money, you can still have the attitude of Karma Yoga.”²⁴⁶

In another popular story, Hansaji explains that all people have a place within society. Using the metaphor of chapatti bread and how it arrives at one’s table, it is explained that there are those thinking types that have marketed and conceived of the product. Then those that are strong that guard the wheat in the fields. Then the trader, predisposed to commerce. Finally, there are those that make the chapatti. Hansaji rounds off the story with the observation that “people used to call these Varnas – Brahmin; Kshatriya; Vaishya; Shudra – but now we say aptitude.” It is made clear that these distinctions remain one and the same thing. Either way, it is taught that the guidance from the Vedas outlines the necessity to give one’s action to the world in terms of Dharmic duty. Practical solutions to everyday problems are animated by nostalgia for the (fictional) glories of the Vedic past and unified faith in a scientific Vedic paradigm as the key to a better future. The various parables communicated reveal an underlying view of how people in society with different “aptitudes” are linked together and how they combine to serve society. More so, what is revealed is a philosophy of yoga consistent with both the Dharmic principles of Hindu scripture and the samrasta vision of the RSS.

If these brief vignettes appear anecdotal then the broader political networks in which the Institute has become embedded demonstrate close relations with

²⁴⁶ Field note: 29/12/19. Karma yoga session. A brief glance at the Institutes corporate brochure illustrates this in a clear message: “Yoga is excellence in work.” Karma Yoga at the Institute generally takes the form of life coaching and attitude training, based in positive psychology, but hinged on the parables of the *Ramayana*.

the Sangh. The ‘101-year anniversary’ of the Institute and twenty-five years working with BMC schools’ celebrations on 28th December 2019 are revealing. The guest of honour was Governor of Maharashtra and senior RSS man Bhagat Singh Koshy (see figure 14). Before governor Koshy arrived, the entire ground floor studio and the central garden of the Institute was decked out with chairs draped in white cloth with saffron sashes. The windows were garlanded with saffron flowers, and giant banners baring the faces of Hansaji and Koshy were set around the garden, and either side of the stage in the main stage. The gates to the Institute were draped in saffron silks. As the crowds gathered and the seating area around the main stage filled out, people began to settle down and the ceremony opened with some stretching and meditation, followed by a Hare Krishna mantra. This was followed by a rendition of the Indian national anthem and the chant of “Bharat mata ki jai!!” (‘Victory to Mother India’) favoured by Hindutva forces. There was then a Hindu lighting of the lamp ceremony.²⁴⁷ Before being shown around the premises by Hrishi Yogendra, Governor Koshy entered the stage to rapturous applause. Koshy’s key note speech served as the highlight of the ceremony. A charismatic speaker, Koshy effortlessly flitted between English and Hindi to highlight his points, concluding that:

“Yoga means union with the almighty. With yourself.
Material progress, credit goes to the West. Undoubtedly.
But material progress is not enough. What are your
contributions to the society? Let us spend some time for
yoga, higher experiences beyond the material. For society
and *atman* [the divine]”.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ The lighting of the lamp denotes the expelling of darkness but moreover, light depicts the presence of god.

²⁴⁸ Field note: 28/12/19. 101-year celebrations at The Yoga Institute.



Figure 14: Hrishi Yogendra gives the Governor of Maharashtra a guided tour of The Yoga Institute before the ceremony begins. Note that Bhagat Singh Koshy wears the black cap of the RSS (photograph by the author).

Koshy's speech and the message that the most important aspect of life is spiritual connection with the divine, highlights efforts – through yoga – to calibrate Hindutva in a globalising world to face inevitable engagement with 'the West'. Simply put, the idea of Indian spirituality as innate is a handy way of staking an Indian (read: Hindu) claim to 'difference' in the world. At the same time, focus on Hinduism and the divine as paramount, effectively shifts attention from the fact that material progress (in education, healthcare, sanitation etc.) has failed to reach vast swathes of the Indian population (see Drèze and Sen, 2013).

In Mumbai there are myriad tensions and stresses in the workplace; life in the city is hectic, dirty, noisy and polluted. Mumbaikars suffer from overcrowding and a distinct lack of green space.²⁴⁹ Meanwhile, yoga is ideally placed for those that seek spiritual and religio-spiritual support to deal with hectic urban lifestyles. Not just as a form of exercise but as a holistic, indigenous technology

²⁴⁹ The sentiment that the city is overcrowded and polluted was echoed by many of the practitioners I studied with at The Yoga Institute. A series of agitations and protests have been launched against the lack of green space and threat posed to those that remain. During my time in the city the most prominent was ongoing protest against the cutting of nearly 3000 trees in Aarey Colony, known as Mumbai's "green lung". See Reuters. 2019. Protests, petitions as green spaces in Indian cities vanish. *Todayonline.com*, 13 October 2019, <https://www.todayonline.com/world/protests-petitions-green-spaces-indian-cities-vanish>, last accessed 2 October 2020.

of wellbeing (see Jaffrelot, 2011). Yoga teaches that it is futile to concentrate on trying to change the world and others – suffering will ensue regardless. Stresses are part of life and the practice of yoga makes one strong enough to deal with these stresses.²⁵⁰ The aim of yoga, therefore, is not to intervene in the external world but to intervene and work on ‘the self’.

In this context, the teachings of The Yoga Institute are highly effective in so far as they inject meaning into the abstraction and alienation that characterises everyday urban life. Daily practice of yoga, then, takes the form of a passive, introverted and personal technology of the self. At the same time, upper caste Hindu ideas are positioned as the universal and supreme antidote to the so-called materialism of ‘the West’. As we will see in the following section, in the *yog shivir* model of the International Day of Yoga, yoga practice is transfigured into a powerful spatial politics and participatory spectacle of collective breathing (*prāṇāyāma*) and postural gymnastics (*āsana*). The result, I claim, is that as the nation is performed in the street (at home and abroad), Hindutva becomes effective through a colonisation of urban public space and the status of Hinduism as a ‘world-dynamic’ force is affirmed.

5.2 The 2019 International Day of Yoga

The International Day of Yoga pivots on the simple idea that on 21st June every year, millions of people from all over the world step onto their yoga mats to exercise in celebration of the restorative physical and spiritual prowess of yoga – India’s gift to the world.²⁵¹ Though initiated by Narendra Modi at the United Nations, curiously, the idea for an International Day of Yoga itself was taken from a Portuguese yoga guru, Suryananda Maha Raja (Born Jorge Veiga e Castro). Yogi Suryananda had been campaigning on the issue for fourteen

²⁵⁰ Field note: 29/12/19. Karma yoga session.

²⁵¹ In addition to International Day of Yoga celebrations across the subcontinent, from mass *yog shivir* at Sri Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru, to Border Security Force (BSF) personnel performing yoga *āsana* in Jammu and Kashmir, a whole range of mass celebrations took place in some of the world’s most famous places, from beneath the Eiffel Tower in Paris, to Times Square, New York City.

years prior to 2015, though the prospect appears to have become more realistic once taken up by Dr Nagendra after the two met in the early 2000s (Puri, 2019).²⁵²

In terms of the organisation of the celebrations on the ground – the mass public practice of yoga āsana – the International Day of Yoga has a long precedent. The phenomenon of *yog shivir* – mass public yoga camps – likely stems from the integration of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and his contemporaries with the emerging practice of modern postural yoga. As Joseph Alter (2004, p. 36-37) notes, on the basis of its derivation from the Sanskrit, *shivir* ‘has martial connotations’. What is important is that the performative aspect of *shivir* is spectacular; cultural values are reproduced and ‘aggressively’ disseminated through mass regimented practice. In many ways these camps resemble a form of mass *puja* (prayer). The mass āsana practice of the International Day of Yoga is hence not new. But rather, a scaled-up version of coordinated *yog shivir* under one (nationalist) umbrella.

In Mumbai, several large events and numerous smaller events comprised the celebrations on 21st June 2019. Celebrations took place all over the city, from a prestigious event at the Nehru Science Centre put on by Iyengar Yogashraya, to a spectacular mediatised display by Indian Navy personnel on the deck of a decommissioned aircraft carrier off shore, as well as large events at government departments, universities and municipal schools. Large commercial events took place at Shivaji Park, Dadar, and the Seawoods Grand Central Mall (Navi Mumbai). One of the biggest and most popular events of the day was The Yoga Institute/Times of India organised ‘Yoga by the Bay’, an enormous *yog shivir* on the Mumbai water front at Marine Drive, a 1.3km coastal stretch between Kililachand Chowk and Marine Drive flyover. The Yoga by the Bay event featured over fifteen thousand Mumbaikars collectively

²⁵² See also ‘The men behind International Day of Yoga’, *Rediff.com*, 11 June 2015, <https://www.rediff.com/news/report/the-men-behind-international-day-of-yoga/20150611.htm>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

breathing and performing yoga āsana in unison (see figure 15).²⁵³ Here we see examples of the theatrical colonisation of urban space in the form of the International Day of Yoga. The difference and segregations of the actual street are sutured as the political street is forged through yoga. Due to its sheer scale and the huge media publicity it garnered across the country, Yoga by the Bay in particular demonstrates the importance of the relationship between such events and the street spaces of their performance.



Figure 15: “Yoga by the Bay” International Day of Yoga celebrations in and through the political street. Organised by The Yoga Institute, Marine drive 21st June 2019.

As Henri Lefebvre pointed out, meaning is defined ‘through habit of action’ – through engagement in practical relationships and ‘interaction between ‘subjects’ and their space and surroundings’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 18; Määtänen, 2007). Rhythmic, choreographed bodies moving and breathing in coordination produce a powerful psychosomatic experience. In terms of mass public forms of yoga, in the case the International Day of Yoga, both language

²⁵³ Media Brief. 2019. Times of India co-organizes massive ‘Yoga By The Bay’ celebration with the Yoga Institute. *Media Brief*. 21 June 2019, <https://www.mediabrief.com/times-of-india-yoga-by-the-bay-5th-idy/>, last accessed 20 September 2020.

and context, discourse and physicality, are instrumental in the formation of sociocultural meaning (Hausner, 2013, p. 112). In the context of the political street and its reproduction, this plays neatly into the strategy of the BJP to generate a sense of imagined political community.

To be sure, a major attraction of yoga practice relates to its clear benefits towards greatly increased mental wellness, physical strength and flexibility. In this regard, since winning power in 2014 the BJP have moved quickly to develop yoga, alongside Ayurvedic medicine into a central pillar of India's 'preventative healthcare and wellness system.' For instance, in Modi's speech to mark the second International Day of Yoga in 2016, he claimed that "there is no health insurance with zero budget, but yoga gives health assurance on zero budget". Modi's speech gives the strong impression that yoga should be seen as a practical alternative to investments in primary healthcare.²⁵⁴ And indeed, among many it is a popular and accessible choice.²⁵⁵ Yet there is more to the promotion of yoga than personal well-being and health. Most importantly, the International Day of Yoga takes the form of a 'colonisation' of urban public space by Hindutva values. By propagating an indigenous form of (Hindu) cultural expression in urban streets, the multi-billion-dollar yoga industry is harnessed to Hindu national pride and international influence.

As "Hindu" bodies are marked out and 'ideology is bound to practice' – in the mode of the International Day of Yoga, yoga āsana affects affiliation to Hindutva values and transfigures them into national values. Accordingly, the fictional reality of the Hindu rashtra – a consecrated space – is produced above all, in and through the political street (see Lefebvre, 1991, p. 215). At the same time, through the popular performance of mass public yoga, Modi is able to position India as a spiritual leader and yoga as the nations gift to the world.

²⁵⁴ See 'Yoga Gives Health on zero budget: Modi', *Business Standard*, 21 June 2016, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/yoga-gives-health-on-zero-budget-modi-116062100127_1.html, last accessed 12 May 2020.

²⁵⁵ Field note: 29/12/19.Karma yoga session.

Yoga brings people together and caters to the psychological and mental stresses of everyday life in the modern world. For this reason, in the Indian context, it is also ‘the perfect vehicle to create a shared national consciousness’ (Suri, 2015).

The global popularity of yoga, its commercialisation and its embrace by celebrity fitness culture is therefore an important aspect of its appeal. In this regard, celebrity is never far from politics and public life in India and tellingly, the star of the 2019 International Day of Yoga in Mumbai was a Bollywood actress and television personality. On the 2019 International Day of Yoga, actress and reality television star Shilpa Shetty Kundra led the most high-profile event in the city (see figure 16). Beginning at 7.00am, the celebrations consisted of a morning yoga session for paramilitary and police officials from the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) at the Gateway of India in south Mumbai. A live stream video of the session and the “huge turnout” was posted to Shilpa Shetty’s popular Instagram account. The video received over half a million views and the event was widely reported in the press. Though led by Shetty Kundra, the event was organised by Patanjali Yog Samiti Mumbai, a local chapter of Baba Ramdev’s Bharat Swabhiman Movement.²⁵⁶ Just in case the organisation behind the event was unclear, alongside the logo of the International Day of Yoga and insignia of the Mumbai Port Trust – who provided access to the land where the session took place – large images of Ramdev in a saffron loin cloth performing the twelve-step Surya Namaskar (‘Sun Salutation’) sequence were spread along a large banner across the front of the stage.

²⁵⁶ On Bharat Swabhiman, see Copeman and Gupta (2019).



Figure 16: Shilpa Shetty Kundra leads the 2019 International Day of Yoga mass demonstration at the Gateway of India, Mumbai. Note the images of Baba Ramdev performing the Surya Namaskar sequence on the stage banner.

Close relations between Shilpa Shetty and Baba Ramdev go back to at least January 2016, where they demonstrated a number of yoga āsana together and talked on stage about the various benefits of yoga at one of Ramdev’s five-day yoga camps in Mumbai. At one point during their exchange, Shetty mocks ‘Westerners’ and their claims to “do yoga”.²⁵⁷ She shows a keen interest in the ‘higher values’ of authentic yoga practice and pays tribute to its ‘Indian’ roots. Alongside promotion of both her own and Ramdev’s various business ventures, Shetty Kundra took time to express her admiration for ‘Baba ji’, his authentic teaching of yoga and its benefits as a system of total health. Yoga was praised as a practice of great learning, where mind, body and soul come together.²⁵⁸

In many respects Shilpa Shetty is highly representative of the aspirations of urban India. Cosmopolitan, stylish and successful, she appears as a commodified archetype of the “modern” Indian woman – glamorous and

²⁵⁷ See Shilpa Shetty Kundra’s comments @50 seconds. ‘Swami Ramdev and Shilpa Shetty Practicing Yoga at Mumbai’, *You Tube*, 20 January 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTY2QvaOWfQ>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

²⁵⁸ Again, see ‘Swami Ramdev and Shilpa Shetty Practicing Yoga at Mumbai’, *You Tube*, 20 January 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTY2QvaOWfQ>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

successful, but dutifully wedded to upper caste Hindu social custom.²⁵⁹ Shilpa Shetty is a keen advocate for healthy living and in recent years has dedicated her time to the promotion of business ventures based on the monetisation of healthy eating, fitness and lifestyle brands.²⁶⁰ The message underpinning Shilpa Shetty Kundra's public image – and for that matter Baba Ramdev's – is that success, happiness and peace of mind are best achieved through yoga and connection to God. As this example demonstrates, it is in effect India's modern-day gurus and celebrities that have brought yoga to the masses. Piggybacking on the fact that yoga has been commodified, branded and sold globally as a fashionable lifestyle choice, the Modi government has successfully jumped on the bandwagon to appropriate and position yoga as an integral part of Hindu culture and a triumphant aspect of national pride.

Taken as a whole, then, the union of Bollywood stardom with Patanjali Yog Samiti Mumbai, points to the 2019 Gateway of India International Day of Yoga session as a concrete expression of the way that capitalism finds expression in different spaces, and how the spiritual has become political through yoga. The global popularity of yoga is a source of pride for aspirational Hindus that are looking to assert their place in the world.²⁶¹ Through the International Day of Yoga (Hindu) India is pictured as the historical and spiritual home of yoga. Hence while the idea of yoga as health wellness is forwarded, it 'would be a mistake' to view yoga in separation from the broader politics of 'saffronisation' and attempts to sideline Muslim and Christian cultural traditions (Puri, 2019, p. 329). Plugged into the global matrix of fitness and wellbeing *Hindu values are presented as universal and supreme*. A standardised, theistic yoga has

²⁵⁹ For discussion of the 'new' Indian woman see for example, Lau (2006) and Thapan (2004). On the negotiation of middle classed Indian women in the public spaces of Mumbai, see Phadke et al (2011, pp. 32-34).

²⁶⁰ Last starring in a Bollywood film in 2007, the main thrust of Shilpa Shetty's current work is encapsulated in the promotion of her yoga and fitness app where she suggests distinct regimens as a cure to particular ailments or undesirable physical traits. For example, specific āsanās for a flatter stomach.

²⁶¹ Field note: 3/01/20. group discussion/Karma yoga workshop at The Yoga Institute. The idea of the International Day of Yoga as promoting awareness and consciousness of the 'true essence' of yoga to 'Westerners', as a way of life and union of mind-body-soul (as opposed to a type of exercise) was popularly held by practitioners at The Yoga Institute.

been claimed and propagated by Hindutva forces and tied to the politico-theistic ambitions of the BJP (Johar, 2015). As we will see, an important way that this strategy takes form is in Narendra Modi's popularisation of the International Day of Yoga, through the propagation of his own cult of personality and savvy utilisation of methods of commercialised celebrity culture.

Yoga with Modi

Modi's public demeanour frequently – and often successfully – draws on extravagant theatrics (Manor, 2019, pp. 120-121). A carefully cultivated aspect of his performative routine is to come across as a Hindu ascetic and long practicing yogi (see figure 17). In an age of digital consumption and social media, Modi and his team have been noted for their tech savvy approach to political campaigning and engagement with Indian celebrities (Chapter one; see also, Sinha, 2018). Accordingly, the digital terrain is a crucial platform for Modi's promotion of Yoga.²⁶² In the run up to the 2019 International Day of Yoga a series of videos with a digital likeness of Modi demonstrating a number of popular āsana were posted to his social media accounts. "Yoga with Modi" achieved its aim – it received extensive coverage in domestic and international media and generated all manner of online attention.

²⁶² At the time of writing Modi has 48.5 million followers on Twitter, 43.6 million followers on Facebook and 24.7 million followers on Instagram. Analysis undertaken by the website *Scroll.in* shows that in the run up to the 2019 General Elections, between October 2018 and March 2019, Modi's 2,143 tweets (one tweet every two hours) were retweeted 7.7 million times and received 32.4 million likes. Global capital has been long circling the subcontinent on the pretence of India's potential to be the first 'truly mobile digital society'. From 2014 to 2018 projections compiled by Google state that India's internet population had almost doubled to 430 million (Mazumdar and Nayar, 2018). For an interesting discussion of "Brand Modi", see Sinha (2018) and also, Raibagi (2019).

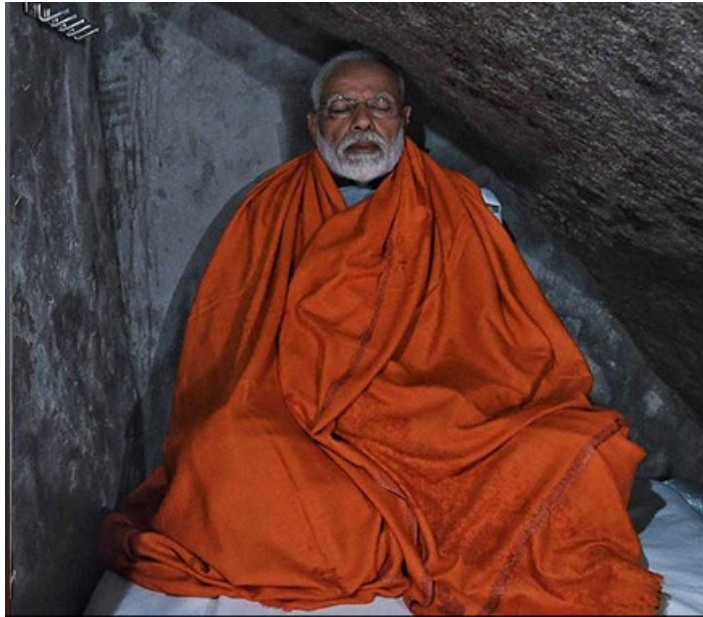


Figure 17: Modi meditates in a Himalayan holy cave for the cameras.

While there is little doubt that Modi is indeed a long-term yoga enthusiast, what should be noted here is the consistency of BJP strategy: Hindu pride in the global popularity and commodification of yoga is harnessed to the master narrative of the rebirth of a golden Vedic age under the supreme leadership of Narendra Modi. As we see in the final section of this chapter, drawing on ideas of Vedic-Hindu destiny and the world-dynamic force of Hinduism, yoga is skilfully configured towards the production of imagined political community. At the same time, the International Day of Yoga provides the perfect vehicle for a mass political spectacle of choreographed bodies in urban space.

Choreographed bodies as an aspect of physical culture (from gymnastics to yoga) have historically played the role of an empty signifier: in this context political meaning is ‘both contested and forged through specific uses of forms’ and manipulated by ideological projects (Tumblety, 2013, p. 711; 722). Here, yoga acts to enmesh the spaces of its performance – and by extension ‘the nation’ – within a collective shared experience, based in active participation in the spectacle and its transmission to a global audience. Accordingly, street performance grounded in the ambience of the political street folds into international mediatised spectacle. It is in this context that the staged

spectacles that comprise the International Day of Yoga are used to generate a sense of Hinduness that is mobilised by Modi as part of the media strategy of the BJP.

Take for instance the narrative built around the popular yoga āsana Surya Namaskar that is articulated in Yoga with Modi. Digital Modi begins by assuming his well-rehearsed familiar role as paterfamilias of the nation:

“Have you made Surya Namaskar a part of your routine?
Do watch this video to know why it is a good idea to do so
and the advantages that come with regularly practicing it.
#YogaDay2019”.²⁶³

Much has been made of the ‘ancient wisdom’ of yoga by Modi and his collaborators and true to form, Surya Namaskar is claimed as part of India’s Vedic heritage.²⁶⁴ Incorporating twelve yoga āsanas into a flowing sequence, the ‘salute to the sun’, or ‘sun salutation’ (sūryanamaskār) has become perhaps the most iconic sequence of contemporary yoga practice. To be sure, evidence of Surya Namaskar’s ancient roots is thin on the ground.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Modi, N. 2019. ‘Have you made Surya Namaskar a part of your routine?’, Twitter, 19 June 2019, <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1141176917216960515?lang=en>, last accessed 20 May 2020.

²⁶⁴ According to “Hindu” folklore and popular yogic wisdom, the energetic knowledge of the sun (sūrya) doubles as the soul of the universe, the body is part of the universe, and thus part of the sun.

²⁶⁵ As far as textual evidence goes, the earliest reference to Surya Namaskar is found in the *Hathapradipikajyotsha* of Brahmānanda (1.61) – a nineteenth century reading of the seminal *Hathapradipika*. In this text Surya Namaskar is stated to be something that causes *affliction* to the body: it is associated with body building and is not classified as ‘yoga’. We find support for these claims in the writings of Shri Yogendra. For Yogendra, ‘Surya namaskars or prostrates to the sun – a form of gymnastics attached to the sun worship in India’ were “indiscriminately mixed up with yoga physical training by the ill-informed”. See [Kaplsh \(2018\)](#). Research in the field of yoga studies has shown that Surya Namaskar dates to the late-1930s, emerging in its contemporary form largely thanks to the patronage of the Raja of Aundh, Pratinidhi Pant in 1938. A devoted physical culturalist and follower of the popular European body builder, Eugene Sandow, Pant was an important figure in the popularisation of the sequence as part of an Indian body building regimen – from outside the Indian cultural traditions of yoga – based on the incorporation of non-Indian practices ([Singleton, 2010, p. 124](#)). Thus, while it is fair to say that the ‘salutation of the sun’ has a well-established lineage in south Asia, the practice of Surya Namaskar demonstrated by Modi emerged within the contemporary yoga milieu in syncretic fashion: one-part regimen of gymnastic physical culture and one-part Hindu prostration to the sun. What matters, of course, is not facts but the fictional consistency of the narrative.

Nonetheless, in recent years, Surya Namaskar has been deliberately politicised at various levels as a Hindu call to prayer.²⁶⁶ It is vigorously promoted by Baba Ramdev, BJP politicians and even takes centre stage to welcome visitors to India in the form of a huge sculpture at Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi.

Wearing a saffron coloured t-shirt and olive-green tracksuit bottoms, digital Modi proceeds to run through the sequence of āsanās that comprise Surya Namaskar (see figure 18). In the English version of the video (it is also posted in Hindi) a male, American accented voiceover narrates and explains the routine of eight yogic postures as it should be performed in a sequence of twelve steps. The Sanskrit names of each āsana are detailed and the precise instructions are sandwiched between offerings of ‘yogic wisdom’. At the beginning of the video, it is explained that “Surya Namaskar helps in the harmonious development of our body, keeping our mind focused and sharpening our intelligence.” To conclude the instructional, a further segment details the scientific credentials and health benefits of the sequence:

“Surya Namaskar increases the capacity of your lungs,
Surya Namaskar improves metabolism and has found to
be very useful in the management of diabetes. Surya

²⁶⁶ For example, Yogi Adityanāth, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and leader of the Nāth Sampradāya (order) of Yogis, claimed in 2015 that those who want to avoid Yoga should “leave Hindustan” and that those opposing Surya Namaskar should drown themselves in the sea (Ali, 2015). In Mumbai, in 2016, the BJP-Shiv Sena controlled BMC ruled that yoga and Surya Namaskar would become mandatory in all civic schools in Mumbai. While the BJP Corporator Dilip Patel claimed to the *Times of India* that there was no foul play involved, as “Yoga is internationally accepted as the best exercise” and that “bringing it into the religious ambit is a political tactic by the opposition”. BMC Corporator Rais Sheikh of the Samajwadi Party fervently objected, claiming that “making Surya Namaskar compulsory in schools is a way to promote Hindutva as its origin lies in the Hindu god Surya (sun). See ‘Surya Namaskar to be must in Mum corporation schools’ *Times of India*, 25 August, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Surya-Namaskar-to-be-must-in-Mum-corporation-schools/articleshow/53852723.cms>, last accessed 12 May 2020. In 2017, Yogi Adityanāth again courted controversy by claiming that Surya Namaskar was similar to Muslim prayers (*namaz*) and that those that looked to oppose it were attempting to divide the country on religious lines. See ‘Surya namaskar similar to namaz: Yogi Adityanath’, *Live Mint*, 29 March 2017, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/gqbE6FxxuzsbGwKYUXJ9O/Surya-namaskar-similar-to-Namaz-Yogi-Adityanath.html>, last accessed 12 May 2020. The promotion of the Surya Namaskar sequence as a foundational yogic exercise and technical method of health and wellbeing, then, in fact doubles up as a ritualised sequence of gestures imbued with political meaning.

Namaskar regulates the secretions of endocrine glands.
Surya Namaskar helps to manage your weight and helps to
strengthen your spine and back muscles.”

Finally, alongside collected thumbnail pictures of digital Modi performing each āsana – and a reiteration of each āsana’s Sanskrit name – the narrator claims that: “regular practice of Surya Namaskar helps in de-toxification of your body, removes laziness thus revitalising the entire body”. Evidently, health and wellness are foregrounded here. However, at the same time, it is worth noting that Yoga with Modi points to a daily regime of physical discipline that fits seamlessly with the regular paramilitary mass drills that comprise the exercise routines of the RSS (Alter, 2004, p. 174).



Figure 18: “Yoga with Modi” digital Modi performs *ashwasanchalanāsana* within a variation of the Surya Namaskar sequence.

Indeed, Surya Namaskar and variations of the “Hindu push-up” have long been incorporated into the callisthenic training of RSS paramilitaries. According to the RSS, ‘expressed in the simplest terms the ideal of the Sangh is to carry the nation to the pinnacle of glory through organizing the entire society.’²⁶⁷ Towards this end, in the daily morning drills of RSS *shakhas* (units) *swayamsevaks* (volunteers) perform a mix of martial arts training

²⁶⁷ RSS. 2020. ‘Know us’, <https://www.rss.org>, last accessed 21 September 2020.

(judo, karate, indigenous forms) and weapons training (drills with the lathi and wooden swords); prayers and yoga including Surya Namaskar – instructions are issued in Sanskrit (see figure 19).²⁶⁸ Further still, in recent years, Surya Namaskar has been actively promoted by the RSS in wider society in relation to the International Day of Yoga and its daily performance in schools.²⁶⁹ In the modern congruence of aerobics, athleticism, physical fitness and yoga,²⁷⁰ that is evident in the promotion of Surya Namaskar by Modi, the RSS, and figures such as Baba Ramdev, Surya Namaskar becomes a collective practice analogous to salutation of the ‘Motherland’ (*Bharat Mata*).



Figure 19: RSS cadres perform *bhujangāsana* within a variation of the Surya Namaskar sequence in mass drill formation.

²⁶⁸ India Today. 2014. With 53 organizations linked to it, RSS operate in almost every field of human activity. *India Today*. 20 March 2014, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19790331-with-53-organizations-linked-to-it-rss-operate-in-almost-every-field-of-human-activity-821888-2014-03-20>, last accessed 21 September 2020.

²⁶⁹ See for instance, Singh. R. 2015. RSS throws its weight behind Surya Namaskar, *Hindustan Times*, 18 March 2015, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/jaipur/rss-throws-its-weight-behind-surya-namaskar/story-4nnAEWdoricZUUXZZfUfaM.html>, last accessed 21 September 2020.

²⁷⁰ Of course, the roots of modern yoga overlap with the development of physical culture movements such as callisthenics and body building. As we have seen, the late nineteenth century revival of Indian yoga was not simply a revival of interest in ancient Vedic wisdom, but a late-colonial revival, replete with concerns with body, health and physicality. Not only did motifs of Indian physical strength and fitness become key expressions of cultural politics – as images representing Grecian ideals of strength and vitality became symbolically important to the Indian anti-colonial struggle (Singleton, 2010, p. 95), yoga itself became intertwined with notions of physical cultural revival.

At first glance, Yoga with Modi presents Surya Namaskar as legitimate on the basis of its rational scientific qualities and therapeutic and curative utility. The sequence is apparently presented in neutral universal terms. However, the emphasis placed on Sanskrit words, the opening yogic wisdom on the role of yoga in the “harmonious development” of the body and Modi’s saffron coloured t-shirt, akin to the saffron robes worn by Hindu ascetics, are all revealing of the motivation to create an imagined political community within the rubric of the Hindu chain of reasoning. In this mode, yoga is presented as a series of ritualised gestures that are generative of space, context and meaning, compatible both with Hindu-spiritual and ritual elements, and the commodification and commercialisation of globalised fitness and wellness industries. Here we see the extent to which a standardised and globally recognised configuration of yoga under the ambit of the Sangh has become tied to the politico-theistic ambitions of the BJP (Johar, 2015). Furthermore, mass public yoga practice acts as a platform to connect urban life and the performance of the nation in the street to the (fictional) reality of Hinduism as a ‘world-dynamic’ force, to which we now turn.

5.4 Hinduism (as world dynamic force) towards the production of imagined community

Key to the promotion of the International Day of Yoga celebrations has been the desire of Narendra Modi to transform India into a revered ‘vishwa guru’ – a spiritual leader, reformer and ‘guru’ to the world.²⁷¹ Such pronouncements hark to an earlier era of Indian internationalism underpinned by the conviction that the spiritual wisdom of ‘the East’ – and India in particular –

²⁷¹ See Dhamija, B. 2017. How to be Vishwa Guru: India must stop squandering its strengths and help solve today’s global problems. *Times of India*, 24 November 2017. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/how-to-be-vishwa-guru-india-must-stop-squandering-its-strengths-and-help-solve-todays-global-problems/>, last accessed 28 September 2020.

had much to teach the world.²⁷² As we saw in chapter two (2.2), Swami Vivekananda, for instance, claimed that all religious paths were accepted by Hinduism and appeared on an evolutionary scale, from the ‘low ideas of idolatry’ to the ‘spiritual heights of Vedanta philosophy’ – the true Hinduism.²⁷³ The mass inaugural 2015 International Day of Yoga celebration in New Delhi led by Modi and the modern gurus of the IYA began with the Rig Vedic prayer *samgacchadhwam samvadadhwam samvo manamsi janatam* (“May you move in harmony, speak in one voice; let your minds be in agreement; just as the ancient gods shared their portion of sacrifice.”) This same prayer opens RSS meetings.²⁷⁴ Though the opening prayer has since been dropped from subsequent official main events, the language of yoga (Sanskrit), practice of Surya Namaskar and chanting of *om* remain common place within vernacular celebrations (Puri, 2019, p. 330).

The crown jewel of all Vivekananda’s claims was the categorically esoteric idea that the slow burning conflicts between religions that have hitherto suffused world history could only be resolved by Hinduism. Accordingly, when Vivekananda travelled to America and the wider world he envisioned the creation of a ‘new order of humanity’ (Beckerlegge, 2013, Killingly, 2014). In the contemporary neoliberal era yoga has the propensity to earn (Hindu) India respect. In this regard, it is no coincidence that Modi is an open admirer of Vivekananda and that he is projected by the Sangh as a Hindutva icon.

The motto of the 2019 International Day of Yoga set out by Modi was “yoga for peace, harmony and progress”. In this context, it is far from insignificant that

²⁷² Famous adherents to this set of ideas included a wide range of thinkers and intellectuals, from Mahatma Gandhi to Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda. Taken together, the attempts of various thinkers to universalise Hinduism were underwritten by the idea that the Vedas represented the ‘one true religion of humanity’ (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 17).

²⁷³ Vivekananda is quoted in Beckerlegge (2013, p. 450). Vivekananda’s chief objective was to present a rationalised version of yogic religious spirituality to the world and did so by suggesting that his teachings were ostensibly “pure” and “authentic” and above all, geared to the ‘spiritual improvement of all mankind’ (Newcombe, 2017, p 7).

²⁷⁴ ‘The men behind International Day of Yoga’, *Rediff.com*, 11 June 2015, <https://www.rediff.com/news/report/the-men-behind-international-day-of-yoga/20150611.htm>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

Modi's speech rounded upon the idea of yogic values as universal values. Dedicating the annual celebrations to ideals of unity and harmony, concluding his speech, Modi summarised a set of key themes:

"I urge you all to embrace yoga and make it an integral part of your daily routine. Yoga is ancient. And moral. It is constant and evolving. For centuries the essence of Yoga has remained the same: healthy body, stable mind, spirit of oneness.

Yoga also furthers unity among people and in our society. This can heal several challenges that our world faces.

Friends: peace [and] harmony have always been associated with yoga. On the occasion of the 5th International Yoga Day, let our motto be: yoga for peace harmony and progress."²⁷⁵

Yoga, then, is subtly framed as crucially relevant in the modern world to the extent that (Hindu) spirituality presents a workable solution to the degradations of (Western) material culture:

"friends: the importance of practicing Yoga is greater than perhaps ever before. We live in a time when disease is related to lifestyle and stress are [sic] increasing. This comes with the fast routines and pressure at the workplace."²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ See Modi, N. 2019. 'World over, the first rays of the sun being welcomed by enthusiastic Yoga practitioners would be a delightful sight', *Twitter*, 21 June 2019, <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1141988189898338305>, last accessed 20 October 2020.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*

In the twenty first century, the so-called ‘world-historical’ mission of Hinduism launches off the back of the global commodification of yoga and desires for wellness in the face of accelerated conditions of alienation and loneliness: a condition that remains the ‘basic experience of the modern world’ (Arendt, 2017). Modi’s appeal to spiritual themes and ideals of individual well-being through the practice of yoga fits well with globalised concerns with health, fitness and wellness. Most importantly, it taps into desires to ‘restore’ Hindu pride. Yoga, in this regard, is used to generate a sense of imagined political community and demarcate Indian ‘difference’ and place in the world. The implicit message is that through the dissemination of ‘ancient’ Hindu culture, it is possible to heal and teach all ‘others’.

In this context, expectedly, the votaries of the International Day of Yoga have much to say about the issue of self-care in the modern world. Take for instance, Baba Ramdev’s claim that ‘loneliness [and] incompleteness are the biggest problems in our lives.’ Ramdev never tires of the teaching that while yoga is ‘scientific physical exercise’, above and beyond, it is a philosophy and way of life: ‘each and every breath is yoga’ – whatever one does in one’s life ‘with purity, with love. This is called yoga’.²⁷⁷ This powerful and appealing theme, that yoga can replace the afflictions and addictions of modern urban life (Western materialism and its discontents) is also present in Modi’s 2019 speech, in his claim to be pained when reading “about bright young man and women [sic], being affected by substance abuse; alcoholism; diabetes.”²⁷⁸ It is strongly hinted at that ‘Western’ afflictions spread by colonialism, rapacious consumerism and imperialism continue to animate the contemporary world. “Yoga”, Modi boldly asserts, “offers solutions to these problems.”²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ See ‘Swami Ramdev addressing Press Conference in London, UK | 22 June 2018, *You Tube*, 22 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OiCcBpu-6o>, last accessed 20 October 2020.

²⁷⁸ See Modi, N. 2019. ‘World over, the first rays of the sun being welcomed by enthusiastic Yoga practitioners would be a delightful sight’, *Twitter*, 21 June 2019, <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1141988189898338305>, last accessed 20 October 2020.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

The idea that ‘Eastern’ (read: Hindu) spirituality – and yoga in particular – can teach the world how to live better is not of course new. To be sure, the proposition that ‘Eastern’ Indian spirituality is superior to ‘Western’ materialism, has long been a motif of Indian nationalist expression. Even the alleged scion of Indian secularism, Jawaharlal Nehru, for instance, strongly believed that ‘Indian spirituality’ – the centre piece of Indian culture – had entered into a long period of degradation, from the golden Upanishadic age’, to its contemporary subsumption and subjugation by ‘Western materialism’ (Blom Hansen, 1999, p. 68). Nehru himself was a keen yoga practitioner, wrote about it in his *Discovery of India*, promoted yoga internationally and moved to include the practice of yoga in Indian health and physical education (see Chintha, 2020).

Thus, for nationalists of all stripes, replication of a binary of ‘Eastern spirituality’ and ‘Western materialism’ has long been a useful way of demarcating Indian difference in the face colonisation, imperialism and latterly, the globalisation of neoliberalism. Modi is in this regard no different – spiritual themes are deeply embedded in his discourse of the global utility of yoga. Like Vivekananda in America, in claiming to return yoga to its (Hindu) Indian roots, the International Day of Yoga represents an attempt by the Sangh to place yoga practice beyond the physical and spiritual development of the individual, and towards the solution of the deepest concerns of humankind. The primary motive driving this narrative is the production of an (imagined) political community of Hindus at home.

We saw in chapter two (2.2) that the spiritual prowess of Hinduism, in juxtaposition to other religio-philosophical systems, has long been framed by nationalists on the subcontinent as the central pillar of Indian greatness – the global realisation of this ‘Indian spirit’ amounts to the ‘world-historical’ mission of Hinduism (Blom Hansen, 1999, p. 69). Evidently, these sentiments retain a central space within the contemporary ideology of Hindutva. For

instance, according to Baba Ramdev (2008, p. 9), a complete philosophy of life appropriate for the Indian nation and the world can be defined in one word. Solutions for world peace are failing and people have become ‘entangled in the web of half-truths’ circulated by religions from ‘Christianity or Islam’ and ‘Buddhisam [sic] or Jainism’. The word for the ‘magical solution that will protect each one’s national pride, religious belief and is free from any selfish interest or greed’ is ‘Yog’ – Yoga ‘is not a cult or theory but complete way of life’. Swami Vivekananda’s logic is thus reconfigured but comes in different forms. From a different angle, but very much endorsing the same message, Hansaji of The Yoga Institute, claims that in the event of the global and universal practice of yoga, “all religion [and] chaos would stop”. While once useful, the time for Christianity and Islam is now over and should give way for the “religion of humanity”.²⁸⁰ That religion is Hinduism and the vehicle for its realisation as a world-dynamic force is Hindutva.

Yet, in the last instance, the narrative of yoga as a vehicle for the ‘world-historical’ mission of Hinduism rests upon the consolidation of imagined community in the political street. Speaking of the right to the city, Henri Lefebvre (1970, p. 30)²⁸¹ claimed that ‘in the street – and enabled by it – a group of inhabitants can manifest itself and *appropriate* the street, they can achieve an appropriated space-time’. In the same way, between the studio, household, digital media strategy and the political street, the spectacle of the International Day of Yoga works towards the production of the imagined community of the Hindu nation. Recalling the Gateway of India celebrations and Yoga by the Bay (5.3), we see how ordinary daily lives merge in the political street into the spectacle of the International Day of Yoga. In celebration of the International Day of Yoga, Hindutva values crystallise through a remarkable colonisation of urban public space. Looking out to the sea, imbued with an idea of India’s place in the world, thousands of

²⁸⁰ Interview with Hansaji Yogendra at The Yoga Institute, 13/01/20.

²⁸¹ Lefebvre is quoted in Purcell (2013, p. 149).

Mumbaikars meditated on Modi's mantra of "yoga for peace, harmony and progress" and the power of yoga as a 'world-dynamic' force.

The street spaces of spectacular yoga performance, then, serve as venues for the extension of 'passive networks' that allow for instantaneous communication and the recognition of commonalities. As Bayat (2017, pp. 104-105) makes clear, urban streets thus become spaces of political expression. Shared identities are recognised 'without necessarily establishing an active or deliberate communication and without being part of an organisation' (Bayat, 2017, p.105). The political street therefore signifies a powerful symbolic utterance that 'goes beyond the physicality of the streets to convey collective sentiments of nation [and] community' (Bayat, 2010, p. 13). Though resting on the physicality of bodies in motion, the politics of the International Day of Yoga are above all, spectacular. Yoga is suffused with political symbolism that is used to generate a sense of Hindutva values as universal and supreme that is in turn disseminated by Modi as an integral part of his media strategy and profile. In summary, yoga in the political streets of Mumbai serves as a powerful 'means of articulation' to yoke together an imagined community of Hindus and their being-in-the-world. As this thesis has hopefully made clear, what is important is not the facts of the story, but the consistency of the narrative that drives it.

5.5 Conclusions

In the concluding chapter of the thesis I recap and elaborate on the main themes of the thesis (6.2) before returning to the question of 'the sacred', nationalism and the city discussed in the literature review section of chapter one (6.3). Subsequently, I offer some concluding thoughts and opinions with special reference to perceived shortcomings of the thesis and the openings for further research that have been generated as a result (6.4). For now, let us briefly summarise the arguments and conclusions of the present chapter.

Since 2014 there has been a visible campaign for the standardisation of yoga that frames Hindutva values as universal and supreme. Narendra Modi has been at the forefront of this political strategy, flanked by a series of popular and powerful figures in the world of Indian yoga. This strategy has culminated most prominently in the inauguration of the International Day of Yoga. The segregations and differences of the actual street are sutured as the abstraction of the political street is reproduced. This chapter has argued that the primary motivation propelling the promotion of yoga by Hindutva forces is to connect a contemporary sense of imagined political community to nostalgia for a (fictional) glorious Hindu past. In doing so, the goal is to draw on the global commodification of yoga and incorporate urban aspirations and desires for self-care and wellness into the production of the Hindu rashtra. In this context, through the spectacle of the International Day of Yoga, Hindutva is grounded in everyday life. The nation is performed in the street.

As a result, the ‘yogic way of life’ is developed as a powerful aspect of the political project for restoration of Hindu pride and realisation of the ‘world-historical’ mission of Hinduism as powerful elements in the production of an imagined community of Hindus. The mission of the RSS-BJP to restore Hindu pride and India’s place in the world propels the popularity of yoga onwards and upwards. At the same time, by looking outward and playing up the idea of Hinduism as a ‘world-dynamic force’ and ‘Eastern’ (Hindu) spirituality as India’s gift to the world, the idea of Hindutva as destined to a higher purpose is projected at home (see Bhatt, 2001, p. 15).

According to the teachings of modern yoga, daily practice takes the form of an introverted and personal technology of the self. And indeed, for many, yoga is experienced as a beautiful, restorative and transformative practice. This chapter has argued that in the International Day of Yoga, yoga becomes a spectacular form of spatial politics open to all, as performance of the nation in the street doubles up as (political) spectacle and ‘means of articulation’ to

propagate the formation of an imagined political community of Hindus. Hindutva becomes effective in the International Day of Yoga through a spectacular colonisation of urban public space. Through ‘Yoga with Modi’ and the celebrity endorsement of yoga practice, promotion of the ‘yogic way of life’ straddles business, religion and politics. The key objective of the standardisation of yoga around Hindutva themes has been to claim India as the historical and spiritual home of yoga. Accordingly, the International Day of Yoga has been developed into an instrument of soft power connected to the late-colonial imaginary of Hinduism as a world-dynamic force, towards the production of the Hindu nation.

Chapter six

Conclusions to a story of the political street

‘There is a politics of space because
space is political.’
– Henri Lefebvre, (1973, p. 59)²⁸²

6.1 Introduction

The overarching concern of this thesis has been to better understand how the politics of Hindutva are reproduced, through apparently uncontroversial spaces and seemingly innocuous everyday practices, in and through the political street. Creative performative politics have long been deployed towards the formation of a tangible sense of nationalist identity in the streets and public spaces of the city. As Indian modernity took apparently stable form under colonial rule, powerful counter movements – in Bombay, the Congress and the CPI in particular – emerged in opposition. In chapter three, it was argued that in the case of Ganpati Utsava and civil disobedience, the ‘means of articulation’ was the politicisation of religio-cultural ‘difference’ through the (de)colonisation of colonial urban space in the city. While the nationalism of the Congress as it was transformed into a mass movement was certainly anti-colonial, it was also underpinned by anti-Muslim, pro-Hindu tendencies. As for the CPI, dominant caste visions (and praxis) of a ‘red’ communist Bombay were paradoxically wedded to the reproduction of Hindu social order. Hindu-Marxist popular movement and the anti-colonial nationalism of the Congress gave birth to the coordinates of an exclusionary Hindu politics, that would have a lasting legacy in the political street.

This legacy has been extended and reconfigured by Hindutva forces after 2014 in the shape of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga. Through an examination of these two case studies, the thesis has understood

²⁸² Lefebvre is quoted in Elden (2007, p. 107).

the politics of Hindutva in the city of Mumbai as a political strategy geared towards the production of an imagined political community of Hindus. The nation is performed in the city's streets and public spaces as urban aspirations, everyday experiences and the nuances of 'the sacred' are folded into the imagined vision of a unitary Hindu nation. The thesis has empirically demonstrated that Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga work to 'suture' together diverse populations (see de Leon, Desai and Tuğal, 2015. 2) against a background of social cleavages of caste and class in neoliberal India. In chapter one, Hindutva was situated, further still, as an exemplary case of far-right politics and a conceptual pivot to better explore how 'religion', political economy and far-right resurgence connect in the twenty first century.

This chapter proceeds to answer the interlocking set of questions put forth in the introduction to the thesis (1.2):

How and why is the ideology of Hindutva so effective? what tools are used to mobilise diverse populations towards the production of imagined community in the political streets of Mumbai? And what role, if any, does the 'colonisation' of urban public spaces play?

The aim of the following section (6.2) of this concluding chapter is to restate, synthesise and contextualise the argument of the thesis, outlining its key themes and the overall contribution of the research. Following this, I take some space to return to the existing literature on religion, nationalism and the city (see 1.4) and outline the ways that the thesis has contributed to and enhanced existing scholarship (6.3). Finally, (6.4) I take stock of the shortcomings of the thesis and offer some concluding thoughts, emerging questions and orientations for future research.

6.2 Performing the nation in the street

The crystallisation of Hindutva politics through the performance of the nation in the street constitutes the golden thread of this thesis. As was argued in chapter two, the social and economic instability peculiar to geographical iterations of post-Fordist neoliberal capitalism gave birth to new wants, needs and desires. After 1980, the Congress moved to an open political strategy of ‘soft’ Hindutva albeit maintaining a rhetoric of secular values when politically expedient to do so. The decline of the Congress as a potent political force coincided with the rise of upper caste desires for conservative restoration in the last instance spearheaded by the RSS. In these circumstances, a ‘new’ right to the city emerged. Above all, the shift towards a neoliberal pattern of accumulation signalled a change in the ways that urban communities engage with politics, the urban is experienced, and thus political strategy is shaped. In this context, my claim has been that as the nation is performed in the street, in the form of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga. By way of a colonisation of urban streets and public spaces, Hindutva politics crystallise and within apparently uncontroversial spaces and everyday practices.

Nationalism in Bombay/Mumbai has always invested heavily in the street and the grand Congress-led ‘high’ politics of anti-colonial struggle set the scene. Themes of discipline, moral community and the idea of Hinduism as a ‘world-dynamic’ force – emanating from a distinct Hindu chain of reasoning – emerged through the colonial encounter and became concrete through the politics of the street. This was empirically demonstrated through analysis of three movements in the making of the political street. Street politics, protests and performances, from Ganpati Utsava, the civil disobedience movement and the Bombay communist movement, were critical in the formation of anti-colonial struggle in the city. But moreover, contributed in a powerful way to the production of a tangible national identity expressed in a Hindu vernacular. Alongside the birth of Hindutva in the writings of V.D Savarkar, within the Hindu Mahasabha and following the formation of the RSS in 1925, formation

of the 'Hindu' political street had already begun between the birth of anti-colonialism and exclusionary Hindu nationalism. Primordial Hindu mythology and anti-Muslim sentiments were set in motion as the crucible of a Hindu chain of reasoning that has shaped Indian nationalist thought from the late-colonial period to the present.

The underlying contribution of the thesis, then, has been to highlight struggles in and through the political street as critical to the production of contemporary forms of Hindutva politics that converge in the performance of the nation. More specifically, the thesis has demonstrated that in the context of the urban rhythms of neoliberalism, the imagined community of the Hindu rashtra, restoration of Hindu pride and idea of Hinduism as a 'world-dynamic' force has been yoked to the everyday urban aspirations of Mumbaikars. As poverty is attributed to the individual and the state is absolved of responsibility, nationalist, bourgeois claims to the city proliferate (Phadke et al, 2011, p. 36). Against the background of neoliberal urbanism and its discontents, aspirations and desires for the management of urban space unfold in visions of 'clean' streets, beautification and disciplined bodies – above all, the 'lower orders' are put in their place. In this context, Hindutva has become effective as it has become progressively aligned with a growing sense of national-popular will. The effect is that the moral and political leadership of the BJP regime of Narendra Modi is legitimised. And accordingly, the political program and world-view of the RSS is accepted as common sense. Piggy backing the aspirations and desires of 'ordinary' Indians the imagined community of Hindus takes form.

It was argued in chapter two that following the emergence of neoliberal urbanity - exemplified in Mumbai in the shift from mills to malls - social worlds of labour and the qualities of everyday life radically changed, albeit over a gradual and uneven process of transformation. As Sudhir Patwardhan's painting *Lower Parel* (figure 4) neatly depicts, Fordist, collectivist modes of

life crumbled as individualised, entrepreneurial practices became dominant. The consistency of a shift in Congress politics to 'soft' Hindutva, from Indira, to Rajiv, and now Rahul Gandhi has coincided with the rise of a specifically neoliberal urbanity in Mumbai. Against this backdrop, desires for beautification, the better management of urban space, cleanliness and sanitation were piggy backed by the BJP in the form of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. At the same time, in the International Day of Yoga we see that individual and collective desires for health, fitness and wellness converge with aspirations for Hindu culture to be globally respected and India to emerge as 'Vishwa Guru' to the world.

Focusing on Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, chapter four elaborated the ways that Hindutva politics draw upon the urban aspirations and desires of large swathes of (predominantly caste Hindu) Mumbaikars for the management of urban space and reinforcement of caste-based Hindu social order. In the case of Swachh Bharat, bourgeois environmentalism and the reconstituted practice of manual scavenging are metabolised into the coherent narrative of a 'clean India'. Swachh Bharat also reveals a powerful class component in the politics of Hindutva. Legitimised by the iconography of Gandhi and led from the front by Narendra Modi, desires for cleanliness and beautification are unevenly realised in the city. The up-market areas of Mumbai have seen significant improvement in terms of general appearance, garbage collection and connection to sanitation infrastructure. The city's burgeoning slums, meanwhile, continue to be neglected by the state. While the sanitation workers that come from these areas are 'officially' glorified, they continue to live in the same conditions and their working day remains the same. The overarching concern of the project is coordination of a political strategy that connects Gandhian narratives of cleanliness to the project for a 'Swachh Bharat' modelled on the RSS samrasta vision of harmony between castes. Swachh Bharat, then, is less about cleaning up the city and improving public health

infrastructure, as it is about the production of Hindu moral community through performance of the nation in the street.

The imagined community of Hindutva is a powerful abstraction that meaningfully connects to the stresses and anxieties of everyday life; it propagates restoration of the Hindu rashtra constructs a sense of the national-popular will that rests on an escape from reality. The myth of a fictional golden past on the verge of restoration consists of a ‘revolt against realism’ (Arendt, 2017, pp. 460-461). Hindutva aims at the production of an imagined community of Hindus and looks to situate India in the world as an internationally revered spiritual leader. Like the foreign Muslim ‘enemy’ of early Congress-led mass politics in Bombay (Ganpati Utsava), this strategy pivots on identification of an imagined enemy in the form of ‘anti-national elements’.

Yet, paradoxically, in the 1992-1993 Bombay riots, extreme violence against Muslims was cultivated in the everyday, through mass outdoor prayers and definition of a symbolic battlefield between friend and enemy. A coordinated political strategy was generated to mobilise devastating communal rioting. Hindu devotional practices in the political street were swiftly weaponised (see chapter three). Recalling the introduction to the thesis (1.1) and discussion of the ideology of Hindutva (2.2), we have seen that Hindutva is a violent ideology. Hindutva crystallises in the political street as a powerful abstraction albeit with concrete effects: xenophobia and violence. While Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga appear as banal and innocuous they nonetheless connect to the omnipresent threat of violence at the core of Hindutva politics.

In consideration of the politics of ‘anti-nationalism’, chapter five noted these themes in the politicisation of yoga. From Baba Ramdev’s (2009, p. 16) claim that ‘those who do not love the soil, culture, civilization, and the people of the

nation have no right to stay in this country’, to Yogi Adityanāth’s invective, that those opposing Surya Namaskar should drown themselves in the sea’ (Ali, 2015). Everyday yoga practice is connected to nostalgia for a (fictional) ancient Hindu past and restoration of a glorious Hindu future. All opposition is ‘anti-national’. Similarly, Swachh Bharat has been dogged by claims of coercion, harassment and violence against lower castes, Dalits and Dalit women in particular, that continue to practice open defecation. At the same time as Swachh Bharat has failed to deal with the caste-based roots of India’s sanitation crisis, it has fuelled the idea that all must do their bit for a cleaner India. Hindutva envisions a caste-based moral community of Hindus, in the case of Swachh Bharat, unified around a casteist ‘culture of cleanliness’. Those seen as not contributing to a ‘Clean India’ are anti-national and therefore deserving of violence.

It was argued in chapter two that while the Hindu chain of reasoning has long structured the politics of the Indian National Congress, the ‘soft’ Hindutva position of the party became progressively more explicit after 1980. This opened up a political space for Hindutva to enter the political mainstream and aided the rise of the BJP to power. Yet, as chapters four and five have shown, despite claims of the BJP to represent Hindu religious aspiration, instead, the project for an imagined political community of Hindus is articulated through a *secular* framework of cleanliness and bourgeois wants for a clean city on the one hand, and the commodification of yoga and its insertion into the global matrix of health and fitness on the other. In short, we must look to India’s political economy and its attendant social cleavages to understand why Hindutva has been so effective after 2014. An understanding of the means of articulation deployed by Hindutva forces – in the context of neoliberal urbanity – is therefore more fruitful than to simply note the idea of India as unique and emphasise its ‘difference’ *per se* (see for example, Derickson, 2014; Parnell and Robinson, 2012; Roy, 2015; Roy and Ong, 2011). Hindutva must therefore be considered in the context of the globalisation of neoliberalism.

What this means, is that the global conjuncture of conditions is critical. Suhas Palshikar (2019, p. 113) is thus, in my view, correct to note that

‘in all probability, a new political idiom, a new political elite, and a new political culture are shaping in contemporary India. As the societal arena goes through more and more changes, the possibility of the present moment turning into a new hegemony becomes stronger’.

Yet all being said, the conclusions of this thesis also underline the fragility of Hindutva politics. Resistance to the nationalism of the Congress in the late-colonial period was assembled by the Communist Party of India in the streets and neighbourhoods of central Bombay. Utopian ideas of a transformation of everyday life were compacted by solidarity in the political street. In the end, the movement was hamstrung by communal division and the persistence of caste relations and the refusal of the CPI high command to confront the realities of ‘graded inequality’ (see chapter three). Nonetheless, the findings of this study suggest that pockets of resistance to the narrative of Swachh Bharat – and thereby the Hindu rashtra – are evident in elements of the bourgeois environmentalist movement as well as the anti-caste politics of anti-manual scavenging movements (see chapter four). What this shows is that the abstraction of Hindutva is at constant risk of being uncovered and potential shifts in social alliances, between Dalit communities and Muslims, for example, render it fragile as a ‘total’ ideology. It is also true, as James Manor (2019, p. 120) has argued, that ‘Indian voters are sophisticated enough to see the ironic contrast between [Modi’s] dazzling theatrics and the drab realities that they face’. As the everyday standards of living for the ‘slum dwellers’ and ‘lower orders’ of Mumbai – and indeed, India as a whole – are further imperilled by BJP rule, the risk of Modi appearing without clothes and Hindutva as antithetical to the pressing needs of Indian citizens increases.

Based on a case study of Mumbai, this thesis has demonstrated that the politics of Hindutva increasingly crystallise in seemingly uncontroversial urban public spaces through theatrical performance of the nation in the street. This has been grounded in a close examination of the BJP's flagship projects, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga. While Hindutva forces have in many ways appropriated diverse 'Hindu' cultural traditions, they have done so through the presentation of a politicised, nationalist sense of 'Hinduness' that hinges above all on principles of disciplined bodies, Hindu political/moral community, and the idea of Hinduism as world-dynamic force. More specifically, the theatrical, performative politics of Hindutva that have emerged under Modi examined within this thesis meaningfully connect with the aspirations of urban India in the twenty first century. Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga address creeping anxieties of everyday life and stoke long-held desires for the restoration of Hindu pride and the (allegedly rightful) place of India in the world. This has aided the production of a relatively stable social formation where corporate interests, the professional classes, and the urban poor have been able to rally around the idea of a strong Hindu rashtra as the road to a prosperous (neoliberal) future.

Counter-movement in the political street

By contrast, the problem of solidarity in the streets *outside* of the performance of the nation in the street has become apparent in the series of protests that followed the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in December 2019. The CAA enshrines 'faith' as an article of citizenship in a way that distinguishes between 'Indian' and 'foreign' religions. With Parsis and Christians listed as faiths that are coterminous with Indian citizenship, Indian Muslims have been marked out as the exception. Mirroring the Israeli law of return (passed in 1950) giving Jews the right to claim Israeli citizenship, the CAA fast tracks citizenship of illegal immigrants from Nepal, Bangladesh and

Pakistan, provided they are not Muslims (Fazal, 2020).²⁸³ The bulk of anti-CAA protestors are unsurprisingly Indian Muslims. But importantly, Muslim communities were substantially flanked by students, civil rights activists and large swathes of progressive Indians.

The protests have represented an assertive Muslim presence in urban public space – thus mounting a challenge to the Hindu political street – but also have been subject to radically uneven policing, with Muslim areas predictably on the sharp end of police brutality (Fazal, 2020). In Mumbai, a mass twenty-five thousand strong student-led protest took place at August Kranti Maidan on 19th December 2020. In the following days, further protests were largely suppressed. Meanwhile, pro-CAA protests were allowed to go ahead (see figure 20). Despite the mass, cross-class dimension to the anti-CAA protests that hit the streets, the BJP quickly developed an aggressive communal narrative to split the crowd. As the protests intensified, Modi provocatively claimed that those people “creating violence” could be “identified by their clothes” – a clear reference to Indian Muslims.²⁸⁴ The protests were quickly picked apart by pro-Hindutva forces with ‘anti-national’ elements identified as the driving force. Between loyalist media and bodies on the streets, it was quickly demonstrated that alternative performances of the nation in the street are a threat that is taken seriously by Hindutva groups. Though in Mumbai anti-Muslim violence following anti-CAA protests has been sporadic and light, the furious violence unleashed against protesters and Muslims in New Delhi

²⁸³ Attempts by the government to reassure Indian Muslims have rung hollow. Many have pointed to the well-publicised fact that after mentioning the citizenship of Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain and Christian migrants in India at a BJP Rally, Home Minister Amit Shah went onto claim that the CAA was needed ‘to flush out the infiltrators from our country’. See Shah, A. 2019. ‘First, we will bring Citizenship Amendment Bill’, *Twitter*, 22 April 2019, <https://twitter.com/AmitShah/status/1120275890871521280>, last accessed 13 June 2020.

²⁸⁴ See Johari, A. 2019. ‘As Modi talks of identifying violent protestors by their clothes, what should Indian Muslims do?’, *Scroll.in*, 17 December 2019, <https://scroll.in/article/947024/as-modi-talks-of-identifying-violent-protesters-by-their-clothes-indian-muslims-face-a-double-bind>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

demonstrates the clear and present danger of opposing Hindutva forces in the streets.²⁸⁵



Figure 20: A busy pro-CAA demonstration outside Dadar Railway station, central Mumbai, December 2019 (photograph by the author).

Performing the nation in the context of COVID-19

The power of Hindutva in the political street is further evident following the radical shift in urban experience in the wake of the spread of COVID-19 to India. On 24th March 2020, Narendra Modi announced that the entire country would be placed under lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus, with all shops, non-essential industry, restaurants and eateries closing with immediate effect. The haphazard implementation of the lockdown hit the urban poor hard, owing to a serious lack of provisions for migrant workers and widespread use of police violence to keep people off the streets (Venkataramakrishnan, 2020). The result on the ground in Mumbai was panic and the mass exodus of millions of daily wage workers from the city.²⁸⁶ With

²⁸⁵ The brutal violence after 23 February 2020 in north east Delhi began following a speech by BJP activist Kapil Mishra threatening protestors. The events comprise the deadliest religious violence in the capital since the anti-Sikh pogroms that spread through the city after the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards in 1984 (Tantray, 2020).

²⁸⁶ Bose (2020).

no way to feed their families for the duration of the lockdown, migrant workers across the country were forced to exit Indian cities and head back to their villages. With over ninety percent of the Indian workforce finding their livelihood in the informal sector (ILO, 2019) and given the serious lack of available and/or affordable transport, for many workers, the only viable option was to walk often hundreds of miles with frequently devastating consequences.²⁸⁷

In response to the evident chaos that ensued, Modi took the tone of patriarch-in-chief and justified the harsh measures as a decision made for the good of ‘the people’. To be sure, contrition for the unnecessary pain suffered by the poor would have amounted to an admission of poor planning. And in the event, as Rohan Venkataramakrishnan (2020) points out, ‘Modi’s penchant for grand announcements, rather than careful policy making, doesn’t allow for this’. The realities of India’s reliance on private health care and woefully inadequate public health system means that the country faces a serious and daunting challenge to contain and combat the effects of COVID-19.

Concurrently, reports of Hindutva groups drinking *Gaumutra* (cow urine) for protection against coronavirus proliferate. Gaumutra has long been advertised by Hindutva forces as a cure to various ailments and disease, more recently receiving strong patronage as a scientifically legitimate product under the Modi government (Penkar, 2020). Likewise, the Indian Yoga Association has called for ‘synchronised global prayers’ to protect against COVID-19 that consist of Sanskrit mantras aimed at the ‘powering up’ of one’s immune system.²⁸⁸ Unsurprisingly, concerted efforts have been made by Hindutva forces to step up attacks on Indian Muslims through mass disinformation; accusing Muslims of being ‘super-spreaders’, questioning the ‘intentions’ of Muslim gatherings and spreading rumours of the formation of various sinister

²⁸⁷ See Ellis-Petersen and Chaurasia (2020).

²⁸⁸ See Indian Yoga Association, 2020. Synchronised Global Prayers: IYA Protocol for COVID- 19. *YogaIYA.in*, <http://www.yogaiya.in/sgp/>, last accessed 20 June 2020.

plots to infect Hindus (Banaji and Bhat, 2020). In the specific context of the virus itself, the Modi government has characteristically prioritised propaganda over public health concerns.

In October 2020, the BJP released official protocol for using Ayurveda and yoga for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. The “evidence-based protocol” released by the Ministry of AYUSH recommends the consumption of *ashwagandha* (Indian ginseng) *guduchi* (heart-leaved moonseed), *pippali* (long pepper), turmeric milk and the performance of yoga to treat asymptomatic and mild COVID-19. This follows Modi’s public championing of ‘traditional’ ways to boost the immune system and direction that people follow guidelines issued by AYUSH to avoid contracting COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. In April 2020, in an address to the nation at the beginning of the crisis, Modi asked that people “drink hot water and *kadha* [herbs] frequently” to avoid contracting the virus.²⁸⁹ At time of writing, India is currently second to the United States in terms of national caseloads and third behind the United States and Brazil in terms of COVID-19 deaths.²⁹⁰

In the early stages of the government’s response to the pandemic, in place of clear outlines around the steps the BJP would be taking to tackle the outbreak and evident economic fallout of the necessary actions, Modi announced a fourteen-hour compulsory “Janata curfew” (People’s curfew) on 22nd March 2020 between 7am and 9pm. At 5pm the PM requested that Indian’s come to their doorways, balconies and windows and ‘keep clapping hands and ringing bells for five mins to salute [essential workers] and encourage them’.²⁹¹ As Modi’s *Taali-thaali bajao* (clap your hands) initiative took place and tens of

²⁸⁹ See Thacker (2020).

²⁹⁰ Gutiérrez and Clarke, 2020. Coronavirus world map: which countries have the most Covid cases and deaths?, *The Guardian*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/20/coronavirus-world-map-which-countries-have-the-most-covid-cases-and-deaths>, last accessed 20 October 2020.

²⁹¹ India Today, 2020. What is Janata Curfew: A curfew of the people, by the people, for the people to fight coronavirus, *India Today*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/janata-curfew-to-fight-coronavirus-pm-modi-urges-citizens-to-stay-off-roads-from-7-am-to-9-pm-on-sunday-1657581-2020-03-19>, last accessed 20 June 2020.

millions of Indians erupted into raucous applause, millions of migrant workers simultaneously fled India's cities with bags slung over their shoulders and their children in their arms. The events have been labelled by some as the greatest exodus since partition.²⁹²

To mark the halfway date in the first phase of India's nationwide three-week lockdown (25th March - 14th April 2020) Modi exhorted the nation to follow his lead and

“on the 5th of April, at 9pm, turn off all the lights in your homes, stand at your doors or in your balconies, and light candles or diyas, torches or mobile flashlights for 9 minutes. I repeat, light candles or diyas, torches or mobile flashlights.”²⁹³

Like Taali-thaali bajao the '9pmfor9minutes' gesture went viral on social media and attracted a great deal of participation. In the context of COVID-19, the focus on theatrical performances of national unity overlooking urban streets has taken place against the backdrop of a serious lack of transparency, dire lack of testing and serious shortages of protective gear for frontline medical workers. The effect on the ground has been that affluent, wealthy Indians are able to stay safe and remain within their homes, while the 'lopsided lockdown' hits the urban poor with full force (see Drèze, 2020). Meanwhile, the project of Modi's BJP for the transformation of India into a Hindu rashtra is advanced through performance of the nation in the street. (see figure 21).

²⁹² Ellis-Petersen and Chaurasia (2020).

²⁹³ Modi is quoted in, The Wire, 2020. Hidden in Plain Sight in Modi's New Coronavirus Action Call, a Pattern of Nines, *The Wire*, 3 April 2020, <https://thewire.in/politics/narendra-modi-nine-covid-19-lights>, Last accessed 20 June 2020.



Figure 21: “India Right Now! #9pm9minutes”. Migrant workers flood out of India’s city’s as affluent residents light candles, diyas, torches and mobile flashlights. Tweeted by Congress MLA Salman Nizami, 5th April 2020.²⁹⁴

6.3 Rethinking nationalism, ‘the sacred’ and the street.

How, then, has this thesis contributed to and enhanced scholarly discussion of religion (‘the sacred’), nationalism and the city? The close study of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in chapter four demonstrated that the project in Mumbai to create a ‘culture of cleanliness’ has been premised on reconstituting the caste culture of Hinduism and piggybacking urban desires for a clean city. This has been done through execution of a political strategy to intertwine ‘religion’ (in the form of the Hindu chain of reasoning) with secular social and political desires for health, sanitation and cleanliness. Swachh Bharat pivots between sacralisation, meaning making and the realm of everyday practices to connect bourgeois environmentalism with a reconstituted form of manual scavenging. Though unstable in design, in effect, all manner of everyday practices aimed at cleaning up the city are folded into the samsrata vision of the RSS. What this means, is that imagined political community is generated through the colonisation of urban public space by Hindutva.

²⁹⁴ Nizami, S. 2020. ‘India right now! #9pm9minutes’, *Twitter*, 5 April 2020 <https://twitter.com/SalmanNizami/status/1246823137154482180>, last accessed 20 June 2020.

In this regard, it appears quite correct to point to ‘unofficially sacred’ spaces of religio-cultural expression in the city and the fact that religion is always in some way connected to the making of place. What this thesis shows is that ‘religion’ is never outside of the social relations of political economy (see Della Dora, 2015; Kong, 2010, p. 769). In particular, the thesis has shown that urban aspirations and bourgeois claims to the city have been connected up to the politico-theistic ambitions of the BJP. In practice, narratives of divine action, transcendent presence and supernatural reality that Justin Tsé (2014, p. 202) talks about are compacted, subsumed and rendered by Hindutva into performance of the nation in the street. In short, we see that religion, or ‘the sacred’ is embedded within the rhythms of everyday life: spectacular, theatrical performance of the nation in the street leverages Hindu ‘common sense’ to structure social cleavages based in cultural ‘difference’ to generate a sense of imagined political community (see de Leon, Desai and Tuğal, 2015, p. 2).

Chapter five offered further support to the work of Alev Çinar (2005), Banu Gökarıksel (2009) and Jenny B. White (2002) in their readings of the religious body as transfigured through performative practices. In a similar vein to these writers, Henri Lefebvre understood that all human societies are founded on repetition, that the time of accumulation, rationality and work actively dominates circadian rhythms. Meanwhile, alongside Catherine Régulier, he also powerfully argued that religious cosmologies intertwine subjective meaning with everyday urban experience (Lefebvre and Régulier, 2004, p. 73). What Gramsci (1971, p. 326) called a ‘secular sense of a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct’ is grounded through yoga and configured as an antidote to the perceived excess of ‘Western’ materialist society and stresses of everyday life. At the same time as yoga offers a passage for India to become ‘Vishwa Guru’ to the world, it generates a sense of imagined political community at home. Apparently

diverse and independent assemblages of bodies in urban public space are in the last instance coordinated by the RSS.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is emblematic of the launch of Hindutva forces into a coordinated political strategy to meaningfully connect the project for a Hindu rashtra to desires for the better management of urban public space, social order and caste hierarchy. Urban aspirations, including those of large swathes of the urban poor for rejuvenation and Hindu pride, fire up enthusiasm for the national project. Correctly, [Deshpande \(2000, p. 198\)](#) notes that ‘mundane, everyday experiences’ – in this case of cleanliness and sanitation – are recruited to the cause. Yet, as we have seen, the intimate inhabited spaces that constitute the ‘banality of neighbourliness’ are dialectically produced as opposed to heterotopic. The geography of Swachh Bharat is reflective of class struggle and capitalist social relations. Most importantly, Hindutva is crystallised through a secular framework of cleanliness. In this respect, Van der Veer et al miss the point when they suggest that ‘urban aspirations’ and thus the articulation of Hindutva in the political street should be considered in separation from matters of ‘class’ and ‘the economy’ ([Van der Veer, 2015, pp.3-4](#)).

Instead, this thesis has argued that the ideology of Hindutva becomes increasingly effective through the theatrical performance of the nation in the street, as diverse populations are mobilised through the colonisation of urban public space. Everyday practices of ‘the sacred’ and (neoliberal) urban aspirations converge in Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga. The consequence is that simplified, upper caste ruling class ideas become the ‘common sense’ language of Hindu national pride and ‘national-popular’ will. The International Day of Yoga is a primary example of this. From the city’s so-called ‘slums’ on the banks of the Mithi river to the up-market neighbourhoods of Malibar Hill, everyday yoga practice has been championed as the answer to health and wellness on the one hand, and national prosperity

and international recognition on the other. Despite its complex history, as Jyoti Puri (2019, p. 330) makes clear, the language of yoga is Sanskrit and through the practice of Surya Namaskar and chanting of *om*, the yoga body is rendered saffron. The power of the political street as a supreme venue of nationalist politics is revealed in the annual congregation of thousands of bodies breathing, moving and performing the Hindu nation in unison.

This thesis has advanced current understandings of religion, nationalism and the street by illustrating the active role of theatrical, performative politics in urban public spaces. Routine, frequently mundane performances of everyday piety, meaningfully connect to ideas of nationalist restoration, and in turn feed into the crystallisation and reproduction of Hindutva through the spectacular colonisation of urban space. ‘Religion’ is therefore both negotiated and mediated at various scales, from the body to the street, the city and the nation. As in the case of the International Day of Yoga, ‘unofficially sacred’ embodied spatial practice reverberates at the scale of the international. Further still, this research has illustrated that neither urban aspirations or religious practices are ever ‘outside’ of capitalist social relations. By contrast, it has been argued that, ultimately, contemporary Hindutva takes shape within the horizon of (neoliberal) capitalist accumulation. Accepting this analysis, however, as we will see, leaves some unanswered questions.

6.4 Closing thoughts and questions

On 29th January 2018, *Outlook India* reported that a Mumbai-based art project had been set up to paint over two hundred and eighty-five houses and transform Jaffar Baba Colony in Bandra West. The result was set to be ‘an explosion of rainbow hues that would be visible from afar, stretching from one dwelling to the next in a wave of unexpected energy.’²⁹⁵ Led by artist and

²⁹⁵ See ‘Artist showcases slums through Misaal Mumbai Initiative’, *Outlook*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/artist-showcases-slums-through-misaal-mumbai-initiative/1241134>, last accessed 6 May 2020.

social activist Rouble Nagi, ‘Misaal Mumbai’ has generated a great deal of publicity and support. Particular praise has come in for the joint mission of the project to bring more ‘colour’ to the cities ‘slums’ on the one hand and ‘change mind-sets’ on the other. Misaal Mumbai is openly specified as an ‘intervention’, the aim of which is to spur further social change. Local people from the area are employed and drafted in as volunteers to paint houses and waterproof roofs against the heavy monsoon rains. The project is in collaboration with Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.²⁹⁶ For Rouble Nagi, who also set up the similar ‘Paint Dharavi’ project in 2016, Misaal Mumbai is not just about colourful makeovers, but ‘uplift’ and the ‘betterment’ of slum dwellers. It is about ‘creating awareness about cleanliness, good health and hygiene.’²⁹⁷ The novelty of Misaal Mumbai is to combine social work with art.

In this regard, an overarching concern of the project – which has now been extended to several areas of the city – is the provision of workshops and centres for women that focus on up-skilling and self-development. The aim, Ms Nagi explains, is that “while [women] look after the family and their kids at home, they can also work and support their family”. The stated objective is female empowerment through self-sufficiency. Most notably, the route to empowerment, according to Misaal Mumbai, is that these women remain within the home. Yet, problematically, despite the fact that greater access to public space is a critical aspect of citizenship still denied to the vast majority of women in the city, equality of access to urban public space is not on the agenda (see Phadke et al, 2011).²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ See ‘Rouble Nagi: Giving A Colourful Makeover To Mumbai Slums | Misaal Mumbai’, *You Tube*, 3 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ys70Pb2XlzA>, last accessed 4 May 2020. See also, ‘Painting One Slum At A Time’, *You Tube*, 28 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G1QZmzmols>, last accessed 4 May 2020.

²⁹⁸ There are interesting parallels here with the devaluation of women’s work examined by Jenny B. White in her study of small-scale community production in Istanbul. White finds that ‘employed’ by their husbands and family members, migrant women in Istanbul’s urban squatter neighbourhoods frequently engage in piece work from their homes and in consequence, serve as a pool of cheap labour for international markets. Through this process, ‘liberation’ from the home is illusive, as the ‘emotional and economic interdependence’ of the Turkish family, alongside its ‘authoritarian and patriarchal character’ is reconstituted in the city (White, 1994, p. 9).

At various points this thesis has discussed the patriarchal and gendered coordinates of Hindutva and accounted for the gendered dimensions of the political street. However, these questions remain largely unexplored within the research. This might reasonably be viewed as a significant omission. However, it also creates a set of openings for further research. Though affluent and educated women in particular are increasingly demanding the right to access public space in contemporary Indian cities, to a large extent, experiences of ‘enclosure’ persist regardless of class, caste or religion (see Butcher, 2017; Roy and Ong, 2011). Interestingly in this regard, despite the progressive, cosmopolitan hue of Misaal Mumbai, the Rouble Nagi Art Foundation is supported by and enjoys close access to the high command of the RSS (see figure 22).



Figure 22: “without commitment, u will never start, but more importantly, without consistency, u will never finish.” Rouble Nagi Tweets about her meeting with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ Nagi, R. 2019. ‘without commitment, u will never start, but more importantly, without consistency, u will never finish. It’s never easy. Keep working, keep striving, never give up, fall down, get up again.

Chapter one touched on the fact that the everyday spaces that constitute the political street have definable gendered limits. This is so at a number of levels, for instance, conservative ideas of the ‘safety’ of women in public space are commonly articulated to reinforce limits to access. Unlike their male counterparts the access of women to public spaces requires legitimate purpose (Phadke, et al, 2011, p. 32). Overall, a pervasive sense that Indian women belong in private spaces, as wives and mothers, hangs in the air. As Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shipa Ranade (2011, pp. 64-69) observe in their study of women and risk on the streets of Mumbai, women and girls are ‘tentative and watchful’ in their occupation of public space. They ‘manufacture purpose’, choosing bus stops and railway stations as waiting points, walk in a purposefully ‘goal-orientated’ manner, and deploy religiosity and the symbolism of marriage to ‘create a bubble of private domestic space’ as they traverse and ‘transgress’ into public spaces. By contrast, caste Hindu men in particular, congregate and loiter without apparent purpose. They hang out and drink chai, are loud, assertive, and inhabit all manner of public spaces with a notable sense of entitlement and ease. There is evidently further research to be done and a lot more to be said, then, about gender and the political street in relation to the politics of Hindutva.

It is of course certainly true that since the 1980s, Hindu nationalist women have engaged in their own assertive negotiations with urban public space. Various groups have developed their own discourses of the Hindu nation from within the Sangh Parivar, that overlap with the ideas generated by the dominant ‘men’s wings’ in both complimentary and antagonistic ways (see Bacchetta, 2004, p. 3). It should therefore be noted that women are prominent and constitute a formidable force within the Hindutva movement in their own

Ease is a greater threat to progress than hardship. @DrMohanBhagwat ji @RSSorg’, *Twitter*, 19 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/ROUBLENAGI/status/1207503632368885761/photo/4>, last accessed 5 July 2020.

right (Bachhetta, 2004; Mehta, 2017; Menon, 2010; Sarkar, 2001).

Nonetheless, it would also appear that Hindutva forces attempt to construct particular typologies of 'Hindu woman' at multiple levels – each with varying degrees of conditional access to public space.

Hindutva's conservative restoration constantly grapples with the market-driven objectification and sexualisation of women and where the place of the so-called 'modern' Hindu woman fits into their world-view. Recalling chapter five (5.2), Shilpa Shetty Kundra in some ways represents a possible negotiation for elements of the Sangh; modern and glamorous but wedded to the primacy of Hindu tradition and the context of 'the nation' in her public pronouncements. Likewise, Roubie Nagi, in her self-identification as 'startlingly modern and intrinsically Indian' is also met with apparent approval from the RSS high command. A further instance of negotiation afforded to affluent upper caste women appears to come in the form of Kangana Ranaut's Lakshmi in 'Don't Let Her Go' (4.4). On the flip side, a much stronger sense of oppressive, neo-traditionalist 'empowerment' – that dovetails with confinement within the home – seems to be deemed appropriate with regards to the lower castes and urban poor.

A further possible point of contention within this thesis is that the heterosexuality of the disciplined (male) Hindu body is taken more or less given. To be sure, the RSS understands the primary social unit of the Hindu nation to be a hyper-masculine, heteronormative male. However, on closer inspection, this is more complex than it seems. Simple binaries do not easily apply. For example, the modern archetype of 'Hindu nationalist man', Narendra Modi, is frequently cast as possessing upper caste qualities, an intellectual (Brahmin) and politician-general (Kshatriya) in equal measure. Loyal media and government communications never tire of boasting of the

‘56-inch chest’ of India’s paterfamilias-in-chief.³⁰⁰ Even more so, Modi is alluded to as a ‘self-made’ man. Only through his love of the nation, was he able to rise from lowly beginnings selling tea with his father to Prime Minister and leader of a resurgent India. Yet, somewhat curiously, he is simultaneously presented as a sanyasi, yogi and ascetic of sorts, with a ‘delicate soul’. Modi often comes across as emotional and cries in public remarkably often, such is his professed love for the nation and attachment to the poor. These latter traits, as Paola Bacchetta (2019, p. 393) points out, are ‘uniformly regarded as effeminate in the West’. The so-called masculinity of Hindutva and how this relates to the political street thus requires closer examination.

Finally, the contours of a thesis that examines the politics of Hindutva in the city streets of Mumbai, opens up space for further research into possible sources of resistance and the potential of a counter movement to the politics of Hindu supremacy. A perpetual sticking point for Hindutva politics is how to accommodate, pacify and absorb Dalits into the Hindu fold. As we have seen (chapter two) from the early stages of its formation the RSS saw the rise of anti-Brahmin ideology among the ‘lower’ and ‘depressed’ castes as a major threat to the integrity of Hindu society (Bhatt, 2001, p. 117). From the second RSS sarsanghchalak, M.S Golwalkar, to the third supreme leader, Madhukar Dattatreya Deoras, the RSS has long made efforts to cultivate the loyalty of Dalits and so-called ‘Other Backward Class’ (OBCs) lower castes to the cause of the Hindu rashtra (see Donthi, 2018). Indeed, current RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat is keen to stress the same ideas of ‘integration’ of Dalits and OBCs with the claim that all Indians are Hindu and familiar depiction of the common (foreign) Muslim enemy.³⁰¹ What the Sangh is interested in is not equality and social democracy (*samaanta*) but social harmony between castes

³⁰⁰ See ‘Modi is the man with 56-inch chest: Amit Shah’, *The Hindu*, 28 April 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha-2019/modi-is-the-man-with-56-inch-chest/article26973945.ece>, last accessed 8 May 2020.

³⁰¹ See ‘130 crore Indians are Hindu society: Mohan Bhagwat’, *The Hindu*, 25 December, 2019 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/130-crore-indians-are-hindu-society-mohan-bhagwat/article30397898.ece>, last accessed 12 May 2020.

(*samrasta*) towards the model ‘one people, one nation, one leader’
(Teltumbde, 2018, p. 44).

In the context of resistance, one such line of possible inquiry comes in the form of the political possibilities of Dalit activism in relation to global anti-racist movements. Broadly speaking, Dalit activism has always been international. In the 1940s, for instance, B.R Ambedkar contacted American activist-intellectual W.E.B Du Bois to ask for a copy of the June 1946 statement made by the National Negro Congress (NNC) to the United Nations. In his letter, Ambedkar recognised that ‘there is so much similarity between the Untouchables of India and the position of the Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary’. Du Bois replied that he was familiar with Ambedkar’s name and expressed ‘every sympathy with the Untouchables of India’. He enclosed the copy of the statement and promised to forward a more comprehensive statement planned by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Before Ambedkar’s time, in 1873 anti-caste social activist Jyotirao Phule penned his polemical work *Gulamgiri* (slavery) to include a dedication to the American abolitionist movement (Desai, 2014).

Connections between Dalits and the struggles of black people in the United States took a more revolutionary turn with the formation of the Dalit Panthers in 1972, a social movement that took place within the city streets. With the Black Panther movement as their evident inspiration, according to the 1973 Dalit Panther manifesto, India’s struggle was against class and caste rule in solidarity with the global black power movement and revolutionary struggles of the ‘Third Dalit World’ in ‘Vietnam, Cambodia, Africa and the like’. Congress rule was depicted as a continuation of the old ‘Hindu feudalism’ that had kept ‘Dalits deprived of power, wealth and status for thousands of years.’ The wider context of the American imperialist enemy was acknowledged. Critically, ‘Dalits’ were broadly defined as ‘neo-Buddhists, the working people,

the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion'.³⁰² The Dalit Panthers were thereby presented as the vanguard of a grand revolutionary-progressive coalition. International solidarity was to be grounded in revolutionary struggle in and through the political street (Slate, 2012).

Based on this rich internationalist history, a series of questions for the contemporary conjuncture emerge: on the matter of international solidarity for anti-caste politics on the one hand, and the state of anti-racist politics in India on the other. For example, despite the existence of rampant police brutality, pervasive caste-discrimination and 'colourism' on the Indian subcontinent, the reaction to the latest wave of Black Lives Matter protests, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in May 2020, has been remarkably muted. Anti-Muslim and casteist attitudes within the Indian police are common. 'Black' Indian lives – predominantly Muslim and Dalit – are routinely lost as a result of police brutality and 'encounter killings' as well as at the hands of 'cow vigilante' mobs, effectively given carte blanche by politicians and law enforcement. Despite the frequency of events, killings, lynching and other assorted atrocities have repeatedly failed to elicit widespread condemnation from the Indian public at large.

Perhaps most important to this apparent disavowal is the pervasive view that race and caste cannot be fruitfully compared. Issues of racism and casteism are further complicated within Indian society by the wide-spread obsession with fair skin. Its contemporary manifestation is most obvious in the glorification of light skinned celebrities, models and the expansive cosmetics market for 'fairness' products. Though tightly connected, prejudice and

³⁰² Dailt Panthers Manifesto. 1973. Appendix-II Dalit Panthers Manifesto (Bombay, 1973), *groundxero.in*, <https://www.groundxero.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DPManifesto.pdf>, last accessed 20 June 2020.

discrimination based on skin tone exists in contemporary India as relatively autonomous from class and the notion of high caste Indians as ‘fair’ (Mishra, 2015, pp. 732-733). This seemingly pervasive way of thinking about race and caste in India, was neatly demonstrated following the series of events that unfolded in August 2001, at the United Nations “World Conference Against Racism” in Durban, South Africa.

Controversy arose at the Durban conference as the Government of India, flanked by several sympathetic eminent sociologists, shut down the attempt by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) to highlight the congruence between casteism and racism as a matter of human rights (Berg, 2007, p. 9). According to the Atal Vajpayee-led BJP government, first of all, caste was not equal to race and second, caste was a matter of purely domestic concern. In this manner, ‘any attempts at an international conference to pronounce on it [were seen as] tantamount to an infringement on state sovereignty (Krishna, 2015, p. 140). The events at Durban demonstrate the way that the BJP were effectively able to out flank efforts to gain the international recognition for Dalit rights as human rights and disavow the strong parallels between racism and casteism. The eventual outcome also points to the problematic absence of strong connections between internationalist solidarity and the political street. Though further research is evidently necessary, it would appear that a counter-project to Hindutva would do well to connect to and draw from global anti-racist street politics, the likes of what we have seen in the United States.

Hindutva in global context

It was noted in chapter one that Hindutva is but one instance of contemporary ‘religious’ far-right resurgence. Most similar to the Indian historical experience, especially after 1980, is that of contemporary Turkey and the rise to power of President Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan and the AKP. We have seen in

this thesis that socioeconomic structures shape conditions of political possibility. In this regard, the rise of Islamic populism in Turkey is too a tale of the city, its streets and its public spaces. In both India and Turkey, amidst the uneven endings of the cold war, the 1980s and 1990s gave birth to a rapid acceleration of urban poverty and inequality, alongside the emergence of a rejuvenated religious right-wing as a formidable political paradigm. Escalating urban poverty stemmed from the coordinated reduction of state capacity under the aegis of Structural Adjustment Programmes' (SAPs) implemented by domestic governments, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (UNHABITAT, 2003, pp. 43-45). Mass rural-urban migration in this period contributed to the rise of informal urban subsistence economies in the poorest areas of the city - the *chawls* (tenements) and *zopadpattis* (slums) of Mumbai and the *gecekondus* (informal settlements) of Istanbul.

By 1994, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had become the first elected Islamist Mayor of the city. In 1995, Bombay became Mumbai under BJP-Shiv Sena leadership. By 1998, the Islamist Refah (Welfare) Party in Turkey had been banned by the military for violating principles of secularism. In the same year, Shiv Sena entered into the ruling national coalition government – the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Remarkably similar to the politics of the RSS and rise to power of Narendra Modi, the social and intellectual base of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's politics is the Khalidi-Naksibandi order, a Turkish Islamic Sufi organisation that acted as an 'incubator' for political Islam through the years of Kemalist oppression after 1924 (Yavuz, 2003, p. 141).³⁰³ After 1980 in particular, the networks of the Naksibandi order served as a powerful political

³⁰³ Sufi orders were officially banned by Mustafa Kemal by March 1924, under legal code 587. Subjected to severe repression, their influence and membership went into decline (Mardin, 1993). However, in being pushed underground, the Naksibandi's adapted their strategies to a long-term struggle, mobilising their followers through promotion of esoteric internal religiosity. As religious education was outlawed in Turkey (the *madrassa* system), many students of the order went abroad to study in Islamic centres such as 'Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus and Medina' coming into contact with Salafi Islamist thinking and the teaching and practices of the Muslim Brotherhood (Cornell, 2015). Subject to the new political climate of the Republic, many Naksibandi's took "cover" in the new state-owned mosques and took up jobs in the bureaucracy, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, in particular. Covering themselves as the "mosque community", according to Hakan Yavuz (2003, p 140) many mosques in Turkey can effectively be seen as "lodges" of the Naksibandi order to this day.

vehicle for the advance of political Islam in Istanbul. The foremost intellectual of Turkish political Islam, was the Naksibandi shayk and leader of the Iskenderpaşa mosque in Istanbul's Fatih district, Mehmet Zahit Kotku (1897-1980).³⁰⁴ Soon after taking leadership of the Iskenderpaşa community in 1952, the mosque was transformed from somewhere that elders 'came to sit and pray' to a centre of education for young people and a hub of influence within the developing political scene. From here, Kotku acted as a spiritual guide for Turkey's post-war generation of Islamist leaders and intellectuals. From future ministers Korkut Özal, Lütfü Doğan and Fehim Adak, to future prime ministers and presidents, Turgut Özal, Necmettin Erbakan and Erdoğan himself (Yavuz, 2003, p. 141). The ideology of political Islam in Turkey that grew out of the Iskenderpaşa community, the *Milli Görüş*, or 'National View' movement, is anchored in racialised ideas of blood and soil, the notion of "Great Turkey" (*Büyük Türkiye*), spiritual rejuvenation and romanticisation of the unity of state and nation.³⁰⁵

The Khalidi-Naksibandi order and the Iskenderpaşa community in particular, then, have played a key role in the development of a nationalist form of Islam that resonates in present far-right political currents in Turkey. Remarkably congruent with the RSS, in terms of political strategy, those associated with *Milli Görüş* have propagated an incremental, long-view strategy of cultural transformation as a necessary pre-requisite to political power.³⁰⁶ After 2002 the newly formed AKP began to dominate the political scene and since 2013, following Erdoğan's increased powers as President, the AKP has brazenly

³⁰⁴ To be clear, Memhet Kotku is far from the sole Islamist intellectual of note in Turkish history. The importance of another totemic figure, Said Nursi (1877-1960) his *tafsir* on the Qur'an, the *Risale-i-nur* and his followers, the *Nurcu* movement are highly relevant. For present purposes I defend the focus on Kotku on the basis of his proximity to state power.

³⁰⁵ Political manifestations of *Milli Görüş* have run from the succession of Erbakan-led Islamist parties after 1983 – the Refah (Welfare) Party and, Fazilet (Virtue) Party – to the triumph in 2002 of Erdoğan's AKP.

³⁰⁶ The role of Kotku is clear here to the extent that he cautioned his disciples 'against premature attempts to establish an Islamic state in Turkey and stated preference for the moral and cultural reorientation of Turkish society as a goal' (Algar, 1990, p. 143). For an in-depth discussion of the long-term vision of the RSS (see Ahmad, 2015).

crushed dissent and neutered the opposition, while maintaining a facade of democratic competition. In a remarkably similar way to the politics of Hindutva, nationalist propaganda of a golden 'Neo-Ottoman' age pivots on the idea of the untapped potential of the Turks – an Islamic civilisation – unjustly held back hitherto by the oppressive imposition of Western 'secular' values by Mustafa Kemal. Thus, a further project emerges. How similar are these cases? On the basis of this thesis and analysis of Hindutva politics by way of performance of the nation in the street, what can one case tell us about the other? Can this lens be effectively expended to other cases of religious far-right politics? How do these exemplary cases compare, for instance, with the politics of Likud under the consolidated leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister of the State of Israel?

Focusing on the city of Mumbai, this thesis has offered an account of Hindutva in the political street. The street is an arena of complex interaction, urban aspirations and desires. Through Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the International Day of Yoga, desires for a resurgent India are brought into alliance around the signifier of a strong Hindu nation. Hindu 'difference' is demarcated in the face of neoliberal globalisation and the Indian people are afforded 'a sense of having a place in the world' (Arendt, 2017, p. 466). We have seen that Swachh Bharat and the International Day of Yoga are tightly intertwined with a political strategy for the recognition of India on the world stage and the revival of its past mythical glory; for the beautification and 'purification' of urban space; and the desire of Indian citizens to participate in globalised bourgeois lifestyle choices. The 'new' theatrical and performative strategies of Hindutva politics taking shape under the leadership of Narendra Modi, generate a sense of Hindu political and moral community that converges in the colonisation of urban space and performance of the nation in the street. My hope is that this thesis and the openings it has created, can be placed within and extend existing discussions of the politics of the far-right in the neoliberal city. More specifically, of course, I hope to have advanced

understandings of the historical and sociological development of Hindutva in the political streets of Mumbai.

Appendix I

<p>THE GAZETTE OF INDIA: EXTRAORDINARY [PART II—Sec. 3(i)]</p> <p>और _____ (जिस का नाम) सरकार ने अधिनियम की धारा 7 के उपबन्धी तत्वा प्रकृति को लक्ष्य में है ; और यह अधिनियम तत्वा नए नियमानुसार कुओं को सुरक्षा का विनिर्देशन करने के लिए 3 से _____ के उपबन्धी के अधिनियम में है ; और आदेश प्रकाश अधिनियम की धारा 2(1) (ii) के तहत पठित धारा 7 के उपबन्धी तत्वा प्रकृति को लक्ष्य में है ; निम्न _____ (विषय संख्या) का अधिकारण करने की पूर्णतः विनिर्दिष्ट शक्ति के अनुसार दी गई है :-</p> <p>(i) अधिकांश का स्थान _____ (ii) अधिकांश की तिथि _____ (iii) अधिकांश के बीच _____</p> <hr/> <p>2. अपने यह काल निर्धार करने की अर्थता है कि सभी वे अधिनियम की धारा _____ के अधिनियम प्रकृति प्रकृति को लक्ष्य में है । अपने _____ (लक्षण) तक विनिर्देशन में स्वचालित रूप से या _____ को _____ पर भी कार्यालय में अधिकांश रूप से उपस्थिति होने की अर्थता की जाती है ।</p> <p>3. अपने आवश्यक स्वचालित रूप से अस्वच्छ रहने या अन्य प्रकार के अधिनियम के विनिर्देशन दिए गए तथा पर उपस्थिति होने में अस्वच्छ रहने की दशा में, यह सहाय जगहों की अर्थता दी गयी है कि इन दिनों में प्रकृति को लक्ष्य में है ।</p> <p style="text-align: right;">प्रतिक्रिया का नाम और पदनाम _____</p> <p>तिथि _____ स्थान _____</p>	<p>[Part II - Section 3(i)] आदेश की धारा : अधिनियम</p> <p>(a) "Act" means the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (25 of 2013);</p> <p>(c) "Cleaning device" includes but not limited to the equipment referred to in rule 5, whether manually or mechanically propelled which can be used to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) clean or enable the transport or flow of sewage in sewers or seepage from septic tanks, and (ii) avoid direct manual contact with such sewage or material. <p>(c) "District Level Survey Committee" means the Committee referred to in rule 11 (2), 11 (18) and 11 (19), with the following composition:-</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 80%;">1. District Magistrate</td> <td style="width: 20%;">Chairman</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. District Level Officer dealing with Scheduled Castes Affairs</td> <td>Member Secretary</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. District Statistical Officer</td> <td>Member</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. District level officer of Urban Development Department/Local Self Government Department</td> <td>Member</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. One representative of railway authority</td> <td>Member</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6. Upto two representatives of Non Government Organisation working for Welfare of manual scavengers and Safai Karamcharis to be nominated by the District Magistrate</td> <td>Member</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7. Upto two community representatives of whom one should be a woman to be nominated by the District Magistrate</td> <td>Member</td> </tr> </table> <p>Functions of the District Level Survey Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. to monitor and oversee the survey process at District level; b. to distribute the materials for awareness campaign to designated place. c. to arrange publicity through local newspapers etc. about the survey. d. to distribute translated survey material to designated place under its jurisdiction. e. to approve final list of manual scavengers for all towns, cities & villages in the district. f. Publication of final consolidated list of the manual scavengers in the district. <p>(g) "enumeration" means any person engaged by a local authority for the purpose of survey or verification of manual scavengers.</p> <p>(h) "inspector" means a person appointed as "inspector" by the appropriate Government as per the provisions of sub-section (1) of section 20 of the Act.</p> <p>(f) "Overseer" means an officer engaged by a local authority to exercise the powers and perform the duties under these rules.</p> <p>(g) "Protective gear" means personal safety gear and safety devices that are to be provided, worn or used by safai karamcharis or sanitary workers in respect of cleaning of sewers and septic tanks that may be necessary for the specific nature of work to be carried out, as including and not limited to the materials referred to in Rule 4 to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) avoid any exposure of human skin to substances which can lead to diseases, along with all breathing equipment which prevents inhalation of gases which can lead to diseases, and also includes any sensory equipment for detection of gases present inside the sewers or septic tanks; (ii) avoid any injuries while carrying out cleaning work. <p>(b) "Safai Karamchari" or "Sanitation Worker" means any person engaged in or employed for any sanitation work, other than domestic work.</p> <p>(i) "Safety precautions" shall include, but not be limited to, the precautions referred to in rule 6, and are all steps necessary to reduce the risk to the person and to avoid contraction of diseases and injuries by the persons engaged in cleaning of sewers and septic tanks due to exposure to sewage or any other</p>	1. District Magistrate	Chairman	2. District Level Officer dealing with Scheduled Castes Affairs	Member Secretary	3. District Statistical Officer	Member	4. District level officer of Urban Development Department/Local Self Government Department	Member	5. One representative of railway authority	Member	6. Upto two representatives of Non Government Organisation working for Welfare of manual scavengers and Safai Karamcharis to be nominated by the District Magistrate	Member	7. Upto two community representatives of whom one should be a woman to be nominated by the District Magistrate	Member
1. District Magistrate	Chairman														
2. District Level Officer dealing with Scheduled Castes Affairs	Member Secretary														
3. District Statistical Officer	Member														
4. District level officer of Urban Development Department/Local Self Government Department	Member														
5. One representative of railway authority	Member														
6. Upto two representatives of Non Government Organisation working for Welfare of manual scavengers and Safai Karamcharis to be nominated by the District Magistrate	Member														
7. Upto two community representatives of whom one should be a woman to be nominated by the District Magistrate	Member														

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT
(Department of Social Justice and Empowerment)

NOTIFICATION
 New Delhi, the 12th December, 2013

G.S.R. 776(E)—In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-sections (1) and (2) of Section 36 read with clause (a) of Sub-Section (1) of Section 37 of the Prohibition of Employment As Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (25 of 2013), the Central Government hereby makes the following rules, namely:—

CHAPTER I
GENERAL

1. Short title and commencement.—

(1) These rules may be called the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Rules, 2013.

(2) They shall come into force on the date of their publication in the Official Gazette.

2. Definitions.—(1) In these rules, unless the context otherwise requires —

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(Part II—Sec. 3)

material in any physical state (solid, liquid or gas) inside the sewers or septic tanks and while entering sewers or septic tanks.

(3) "State Level Survey Committee" means the Committee referred to in rules 10(2), 10(3) and 13 (2) with the following composition—

1. Additional Chief Secretary or Principal Secretary, nominated by the State Government	Chairman
2. Principal Secretary/Secretary dealing with Scheduled Castes, if the Committee is chaired by Additional Chief Secretary, if Principal Secretary, Scheduled Caste Welfare himself or the Chairman from Director, Scheduled Caste Welfare	Member Secretary
3. Director, Economics and Statistics	Member
4. Secretary, Urban Development Department/Local Self Government Department	Member
5. Regional Director, Census Operations	Member
6. One representative of railway authority	Member
7. Up to two representatives of Non Government Organizations working for Welfare of Manual Scavengers and Slatia Karamcharis to be nominated by the State Government	Member
8. Up to two community representatives of whom one should be a woman to be nominated by the State Government	Member

Functions of the State Level Survey Committee:

- to initiate and oversee the survey process at state level,
- to distribute the materials for awareness campaigns to designated places,
- to arrange publicity through local newspapers etc. about the survey,
- to distribute translated survey material to designated places under its jurisdiction,
- to approve final list of manual scavengers for all towns, cities and villages in the state,
- Publication of final consolidated list of the manual scavengers in the state.

(7) Words and expressions used and not defined in these rules but, defined in the Act, shall have the same meanings as assigned to them in the Act.

CHAPTER—II

OBLIGATIONS OF EMPLOYER TOWARDS EMPLOYEES ENGAGED IN THE CLEANING OF SEWER OR SEPTIC TANK

3. (1) No person shall be allowed to clean a sewer manually, with the protective gear and safety devices under these rules except—

- for the removal of concrete or FRP(Fibre Reinforced Plastic) or damaged manhole those where mechanical equipments cannot be put into operation,
- for inter-linking the newly laid sewer main with the existing sewer main, in case of sewer of size of more than 300 mm diameter,
- for removal of submersible pump and fixed at the bottom of the suction, wells,
- for the reconstruction of the manhole or rectification of the sewer main,

Any circumstance, when it is absolutely necessary to have manual sewage cleaning, after the CEO of the local authority has permitted to do so after recording in writing the specific valid reasons for allowing such cleaning.

(2) For the purposes of clauses (c) and (d) of sub-rule (1), before allowing entry of a person in the sewer, sewage shall be totally stopped.

(3) Any person engaged to clean a sewer or a septic tank shall be provided by his employer, protective gear and safety devices including, but not limited to the following—

- Air compressor for blower

[PART II—SECT. 3]

[PART II—SECT. 3]

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- Air line breathing apparatus
- Air line respirator with manually operated air blower
- Air Purifier Gas masklike cover
- Artificial respiration/Breathalyzer
- Barrier caution tape
- Barrier cones
- Barrier cone
- Blower
- Breath mask
- Breathing Apparatus
- Cautious board
- Chlorine mask
- Emergency medical oxygen resuscitator Kit
- First Aid Box
- First Mask
- Gas Monitor (4 gases)
- Guide Pipe Set
- Full body wader suit
- Fitting wader suit attached with boots
- Hand gloves
- Head Lamp
- Helmet
- Helmet demounting
- Lead warning paper
- Life guard post
- Modular Airflow Supply Trailing System
- Normal face mask
- Nylon rope ladder 3 metres
- Nylon safety belt
- Nylon safety belt
- Pocket book
- Port key
- Raincoat
- Reflecting Jacket
- Safety belt
- Safety body clothing
- Safety body harness
- Safety goggles
- Safety Goggles
- Safety helmet
- Safety showers
- Safety sock
- Safety Tripod Set
- Search light

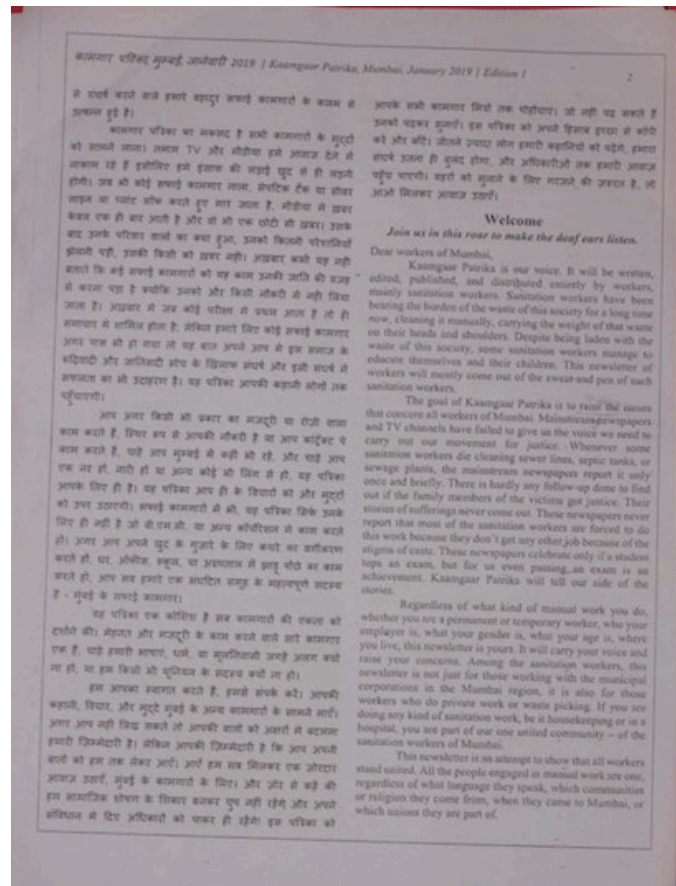
5. The local authority shall ensure that the following cleaning devices are used by persons engaged in cleaning sewer or septic tank including but not limited to the following :

- Sewer Line Cleaning Battering Machine
- Jetting Machine

- (vi) Suction Machine (Sewer Emptying)
 - (vii) Combined Machine (Jetting cum Suction)
 - (viii) Deep Suction Combined Machine (Jetting cum Suction Machine)
 - (ix) Manual Hand Operated Grab Bucket
 - (x) Hydraulic Operated Tridley Mounted Grab Bucket
 - (xi) Truck Mounted Motor & Winch Operated Grab Bucket Machine
 - (xii) Fixed Structure Mounted Motor & Winch Operated Grab Bucket Machine
 - (xiii) Rickshaw Mounted Winch & Motor Operated Decoupling Machine for Wet well
 - (xiv) Rickshaw Mounted Winch & Auxiliary Engine Operated Decoupling Machine for Manhole
 - (xv) Escort Hydr Crane Mounted Hydraulic Winch Operated Grab Bucket Decoupling Machine
 - (xvi) Manual rods, shovels, spades, drainage cleaning machines and steel scrapers with handles
 - (xvii) Hooks and wrenching instruments
- (1) All protective gear and safety devices under these rules shall be checked every six months and necessary repair or replacements shall be made by the employer who engages a person for cleaning a sewer or a septic tank.
- (2) Comfortable bodysuits shall be made available to the worker who has to enter sewers or septic tanks for their cleaning. The employer shall provide full body suits to workers entering manholes of depth more than five feet and alternatively, partial fishing wader body suits to those entering manholes of depth less than five feet.
- (3) The employer shall also ensure the following safety precautions before a person is engaged in the cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank, namely:-
- (a) There shall be a minimum of three employees present all the time, one of whom shall be a supervisor.
 - (b) The atmosphere within the confined space shall be tested for oxygen deficiency and toxic and combustible gases including but not limited to poisonous gases like Hydrogen Sulphide, Carbon Monoxide, Methane, and gasoline vapours, through detection tests including the following:-
 - (i) lowering a detector lamp into the manhole,
 - (ii) inserting wet lead acetate paper which changes colour in the presence of hazardous gases,
 - (iii) detection of gases through gas detector masks.
 - (c) Before starting the cleaning under sub-rule (1) the supervisor referred to in clause (a) of sub-rule (1) has inspected and determined if the sewer serves any industries nearby to anticipate any hazardous atmosphere that may be encountered.
 - (d) The condition of metal-rung ladders and the side walls of the manhole shall be checked to see if there is any danger of collapse.
 - (e) Traffic and pedestrian barricades are provided all the times.
 - (f) A flag man should be stationed at least 50 feet ahead of a site and should be visible to incoming traffic for at least 500 feet.
 - (g) Regular medical check-up of sewer workers which shall include the examination of respiratory organs, skin injuries, and other occupational diseases and injuries for their treatment to ensure that sewer workers afflicted with such diseases or injuries do not enter sewers for cleaning.
 - (h) Regular vaccination against respiratory and skin diseases and other occupational diseases in which these workers are prone due to exposure to harmful substances and gases in sewers.
 - (i) All employees who are present on-site during cleaning work are given training and adequately familiarised with the knowledge to operate all equipments involved in cleaning work, to avoid injuries or diseases associated with such work and to take necessary steps in case of emergency arising at the place of work and the training shall be conducted every two years and the employees shall be familiarised with any changes in method and technique with respect to the above.

- (j) The supervisor promotes and keeps handy the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the nearest hospitals or clinics.
 - (k) Cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank shall be done:-
 - (i) only in day-light; and
 - (ii) for a duration not exceeding 90 minutes, at a stretch. There shall be a mandatory interval of 30 minutes between two stretches.
 - (l) Identify and close off or secure any lines that might carry harmful substances to, or through, the work area.
 - (m) Ensure that written operating and rescue procedures are displayed at the entry site.
 - (n) If the entry is made through a top opening, use a hoisting device with a harness that suspends a person in an upright position and a mechanical device shall be available to retrieve personnel from vertical spaces more than five feet deep.
 - (o) At least one person trained in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation should be immediately available during any confined space job.
 - (p) Oxygen content in the manhole must be at least 19.5% in the confined space of the manhole measured at all levels (bottom, middle and top) and no person enters the manhole if oxygen level is below 19.5% and more than 21%.
 - (q) Ventilate the sewer line by opening at least two or three manholes on both sides where work is to be carried out.
 - (r) Manhole shall be opened at least one hour before the start of operation.
 - (s) The opened manhole shall be properly fenced or barricaded to prevent any person, specially children, from accidentally falling into the sewer. Dummy cover with welded fabric or wire-net may be used.
 - (t) All workers use the safety gear and safety devices before entering the sewer line.
 - (u) The person entering the manhole or sewer line must be monitored using signal or camera or CCTV etc., throughout the operation period.
 - (v) Structural safety of manhole rings or steps must be tested before entering the manhole.
 - (w) Portable illumination ladder is available during the work period where necessary and the portable ladder is properly secured or fixed during use.
 - (x) No material or tools are located near the edge which can fall into the manhole and injure the workman.
 - (y) Equipments used during sewer cleaning are explosion and fire-proof.
 - (z) Smoking, open flames are prohibited inside the manhole as well as in the immediate vicinity of open manholes.
 - (aa) In the event of a sudden or unpredictable atmospheric change, an emergency escape breathing apparatus with atleast a 10 minute air supply is worn.
7. The employer shall ensure the following safety precautions at the time when the person is engaged in the cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank:-
- (a) Portable fans and air blowers with batteries, in good working condition, with a back up capacity of more than the estimated duration of the entry of the person in the sewer, shall be carried into sewers for ventilation and a ventilation source shall be installed at the mouth of the man hole.
 - (b) Flashlights and communication devices such as two-way radios shall be carried into sewers.
 - (c) Presence of the following rescue equipment at the site:-
 - (i) A tripod and harness system, or some other method ensuring manoeuvring of an injured worker to the surface.
 - (ii) A basket stretcher, or similar device, shall be available for moving the injured worker to emergency transportation.
 - (iii) First aid equipment as given in Annexure-I, and trained personnel shall be immediately available.
 - (d) The employer shall ensure availability of ambulance and follow-up in close proximity.
 - (e) The employer shall ensure that the assigned person has life insurance policy of at least ten lakh rupees and the premium for which shall be paid by the employer.
8. The employer shall ensure the following post-cleaning safety precautions after an person engaged in the cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank comes out of the sewer or septic tank after a session of cleaning:-

Appendix II



सबसे पहले, 1965 में विभाग सी. के मलनिस्सारण खाता, चण्दनवाडी मुंबई में मैं बर्नोपारी बना। उस वक़्त मैं 4वीं कक्षा का था।

जब मैं कामगार था, तब मेरे मन में अनेक विचार आते थे, जैसे अगर मेरी पढ़ाई और थोड़ी ज्यादा होती तो मैं भी एक बड़ा अधिकारी बन जाता। मेरा भविष्य क्या होगा, अगर भविष्य में इसी स्थिति में रहूँगा तो कामगार हुंका कामगार और कामगार दुना मुक़ादम ही हो पाउगा। अगर क्या वह मेरे जीवन को उज्जवल बनाएगा? क्या वह मेरे परिवार के लिए अच्छा होगा? ऐसे अनेक प्रश्न मेरे मन में घूमते रहे, चिंतित करते रहे, और अखिर मैंने निश्चय कर लिया कि मेरी अधूरी पढ़ाई मैं अब फिर से पूरी करूँगा, और कोई रास्ता नहीं है। इसी तरह मैंने 1965 में अपने भाई वसंत लखन से बातचीत कर और बहुत ज़िद कर उनसे कहा कि कैसे भी कर के मुझे बाइकपुला मॉडर्न स्कूल में दाखिला करा दो। इस तरह मेरा 4वीं कक्षा में फिर से दाखिला हुआ। प्रवेश मिलने के बाद मैंने 4वीं और 10वीं कक्षा को पास किया।

10वीं कक्षा पास होने पर मेरे साथ काम करने वाली ने मेरा सन्कार किया। उस वक़्त मा. नगरसेवक विमल अवघट (महोदय विधान परिषद के विधायक) और नगरसेवक दिनाकर झारापकर यह उपस्थित थे। उस वक़्त विभाग अधिकारी मा. मीनो साहब और शिवालय निवारण अधिकारी मा. पुजारी बाई इन्होंने भी मेरा सन्कार किया और आगे की पढ़ाई करने के लिए मुझे प्रोत्साहित किया। तब मैंने 11वीं में पास मॉडर्न जूनियर कॉलेज में दाखिला लिया। उस वक़्त मेरे दोस्त सिद्धार्थ जलधर स्वच्छता निरीक्षक के डिप्लोमा की तयारी कर रहे थे। मैंने ऐसीही उनको पूछा कि क्या वह पढ़ाई मैं कर सकूँगा? उन्होंने हाँ कहकर इस पढ़ाई के लिए मुझे पूरी तरह मदद की। जब मैं 11वीं में आया था तब 1969 के दम हो रहे थे। ऐसी परिस्थिति में मैंने 11वीं और स्वच्छता निरीक्षक के डिप्लोमा के इम्तिहानों को पास किया। एक बार फिर से सबने मेरा बहुत दुखी से सन्कार किया। बीमारी पुजारी बाई ने तो अपने सब परिवार वालों को बुलाकर उनके-समने मेरी तारीफ की। वह मेरे लिए और भी आश्चर्य की बात थी। क्योंकि पुजारी बाई और उनका परिवार ब्राह्मण समाज के थे और उनका मेरा सन्कार बराबर वह मेरे और समाज के लिए अविश्वसनीय ज़ेहा था।

मैंने निश्चय किया, मुझे पढ़ना चाहिए, बड़ा होना चाहिए, और उसी वक़्त मैंने अपना बी.ए. पूरा किया।

आज मैं कनिष्ठ अवेसक इस पद पर पिछले 22 साल से नियुक्त हूँ। यह काम करते करते मैंने अपना एस.एस.सी., डी.एस.एस., और एम.ए. पूरा कर लिया। अभी आगे मैं पी.एच.डी. में प्रवेश करने के लिए प्रयास कर रहा हूँ।

I have decided

I have decided! I must learn more and be someone big, and so I completed B.A.

- Vijay Laxman Talekar
(translator - Rahul Bhalekar)

Myself Vijay Laxman Talekar, aged 51 years, living with my wife Adv. Vinita and my daughter Miss. Kshitija in Seawoods West, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Memorial Road, Navi Mumbai. My education is BA, MA, LLB, D.L., and Sanitary Inspector Diploma.

In 1986, I joined Mumbai Municipal Corporation's 'Malanissaran (Sewage Treatment) department, C division, Chandanwadi, Mumbai as a labourer. My education at that time was 9th fail.

While working as a labourer, multiple thoughts ran through my mind, like if I had more education I could have been a senior officer, what would be my future, I would remain a labourer all along, at the most I can be a supervisor (Mukadam). But will this be a fulfilling life? Will it be in my family's interest? After being hounded by such questions and later some contemplation over it, finally I made a decision, to resume the discontinued education, there was no other way, and so in 1988 with some talk, I persuaded my elder brother Vasant Talekar to help get me enrolled in the Byculla Night School. And, so, I was admitted to the 9th standard again. Passed the 9th and 10th class exams.

On passing 10th, I was felicitated by fellow workers. Corporator Vilas Avachat (ex MLA) and Corporator Dinkar Zarpakar (late) were present at the time. Divisional officer Mr. Gandhi and complaints redressal officer Mrs. Pujari Bai also complimented and encouraged me for further education and I got admission in Parel Night Junior College. My friend Siddharth Jadhav was pursuing a Diploma for Sanitary Inspector at the time. I asked him if I can also do the same to which he responded positively and immensely helped me with the preparation. In 1992, in the midst of the riots, I passed both 12th standard and the Sanitary Inspector Diploma. Again, I received high praises from everyone. Mrs. Pujari went on to call all her family members and praised my efforts in front of them. This was all the more surprising for me. More because, Mrs. Pujari and her family were Brahmins and they felicitating me was difficult to believe for me and the society.

I have decided! I must learn more and be someone big, and so I completed B.A.

And I was appointed as a Junior Officer. It has been 22 years I have been working at this post. Thereon, I completed L.L.B., D.L.L. and M.A. courses while working. And now I am trying to get admission for a Ph.D.

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